■ore no imouto ga konnani kawaii wake ga nai ⑪

# 俺の妹がこんなに可愛いわけがない⑪

Illustration・かんざきひろ
伏見つかさ
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# 俺の妹がこんなに可愛いわけがない 11

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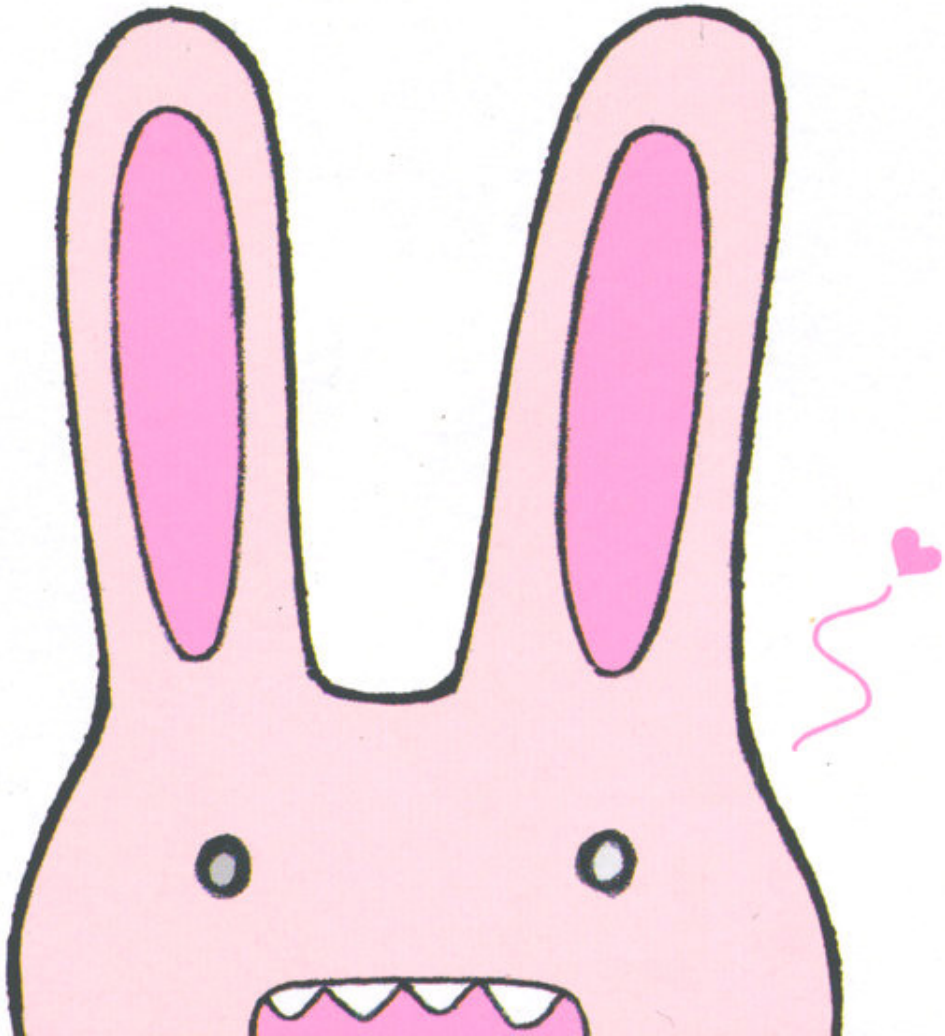
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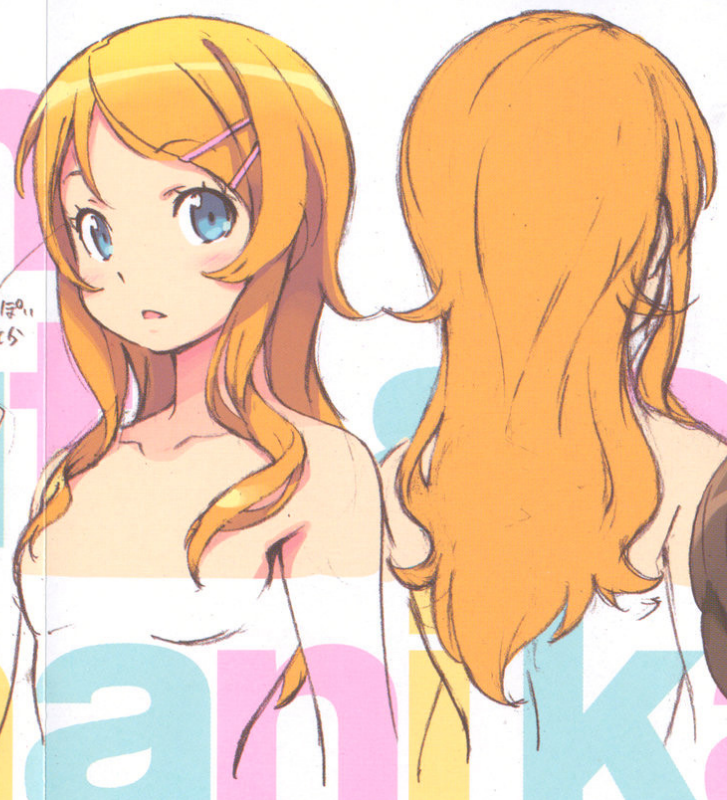


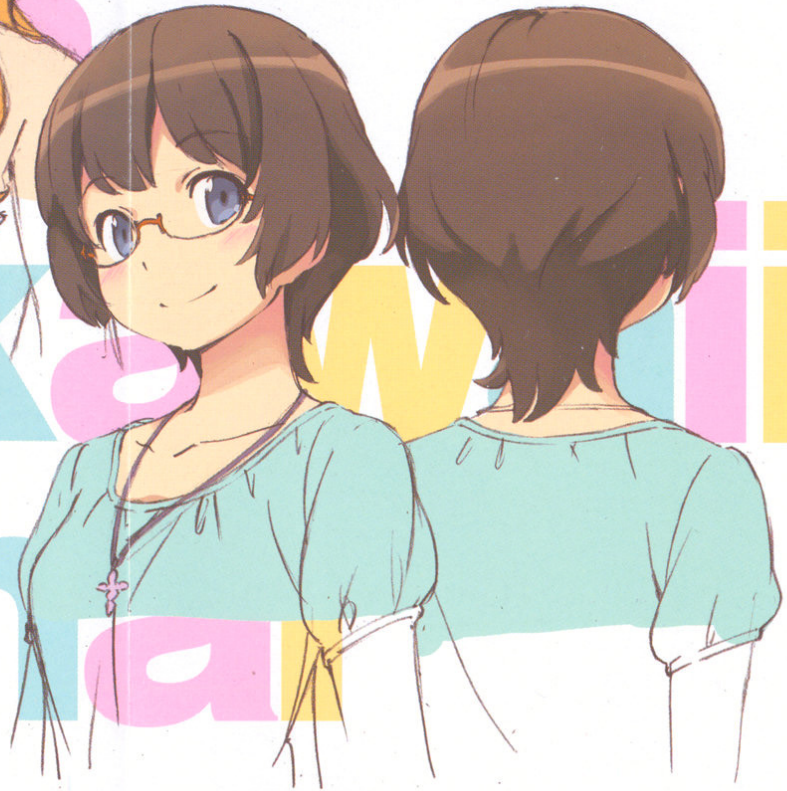

## ???

あー、こいつに関しては
ネタバレになるから小説本文を
読んでくれとしか言えないな。

## 桐乃 New Hair Style

ご存知俺の妹だ。最近髪型を変えて、
ぐっと大人っぽくなりやがった。
まぁ、なんだ……ようするにアレだな。
――俺の妹がこんなに可愛いわけがない！





## 麻奈実 New Hair Style?

イメチェンに挑戦中の、俺の幼馴染みだ。
俺としては、かなりいいんじゃねーかと思うんだが、
どうだろうか。
『まだ髪を伸ばしている最中』らしいから、
そのうち完全体になった麻奈実が見られるかもな。
垢抜けるのはいいが、
願わくばコンタクトにはしないで欲しいもんだ。

# 春色の汗がしょっぱいのは、可愛いあいつのせいだ。

11

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# Chapter 1

# 第一章



During a cold week in December, at the Tamura household, a wonderful space had been formed, surrounded by colorful wallpaper and a statue of Santa Claus. I was sitting in a corridor —

Because there was something unbelievable in front of me.

"Welcome!"

"Ah? —Kirino?"

"Ah? Ran-chan?"

"What are you doing? Are you working here part-time?"

"Nope, today I'm taking a break and helping here."

Clad in the Tamura's household uniform (plain clothes), and a Christmas hat — Kirino was helping out at the Tamura household.

It seemed like the customer was Kirino's friend.

It was a cheerful girl, who I had seen a few times before. Her name was — Miyamoto or something. Every time we met, she made me feel lower than dirt, so she's someone I don't want to meet.

So I hid.

"Ha ha ~ Kirino! That suits you! You are so cute in that Christmas hat ~♪"

"Eheehee, thank you."

"Wow, what do you have here?"

"These are homemade Christmas desserts, which now have a twenty percent discount, so I recommend that you buy one!"

"Really! Then please."

"Thank you very much. Do you want some Christmas cake too?"

"Ahahah, Kirino, you look like a clerk ~"

"Heehee, I'm now a clerk."

Bang — the door was opened again and new customers entered.

One of the girls saw Miyamoto and waved her hand:

"Ah, if it isn't Ran-chan."

Hearing that, she shouted back:

"You guys are just in time! Come on, come on! Look, look! Kirino is working as a clerk!"

"Ah ~? What?"

"Ah~ everyone, welcome."

Kirino returned a small seller's smile.

The 'Goddess of the School' like Ayase said, Kirino-sama was chatting with them and inviting them to buy sweets at the same time.

To put it crudely, this is not how Tamura's household is supposed to be.

"…Really, this girl spent ¥4000?"

"Ahaha, Kirino-chan is like the Tamura household's mascot~"

Just like Kirino, Manami was wearing an apron and a Christmas hat.

Hey, hey, Manami… She took this position from you, aren't you angry?

"Uh? What were you doing, Kyou-chan?"

I haven't done anything…

"Nothing… Nothing at all… Sorry, but please just let Kirino handle it."

"It's fine. It was a big help. It has been a long time since my house has been that busy. How about letting Kirino-chan get married into my family ~"

That was too much of a joke. What are you, a granny?

"Well, this has gone better than I expected."

I looked to the side and saw Kirino was smiling happily with the other customers.

"…Maybe she is suited for this role."

The reason for Kirino to do something so strange — well, please remember the celebration party during October. At that time, Kirino and Manami had reached an agreement for a discussion.

In order to do that, Kirino led her brother (me, of course) to Tamura's household, but —

"Sorry Kyou-chan. Until my parents come back, I have to take care of the shop."

Hearing Manami say that, Kirino smiled happily:

"Then I will help out too."

And then it turned into this.

"So Kirino — see you again at school this week!"

"Yes! Thank you for coming!"

"Hahahaha."

Kirino's friends left together —

"Wow…"

Manami let out a surprised sound.

"We sold them all!"

"Everything?"

"Yes. Everything."

"But it's not even lunch yet. Could it be that you didn't prepare enough?"

"Of course not ~ We prepared the same amount as for Halloween. Ah, I have to put up the 'Sold Out' sign."

Manami hastily ran outside.

"Hm… phew~~"

Kirino proudly puffed up her chest.

"It's all because of me! If this shop had such a cute mascot like me, it would flourish!"

Yeah, yeah, another one of your self-satisfying delusions. How many times have you done this before?

…But… But… even if I don't want to admit it…

"It's true, just like you said."

"Ah?"

Kirino tilted her head slightly, her ears moved. I praised her honestly:

"You are so amazing."

"Hm, so noisy."

Why are you getting angry because I praised you, imouto-sama?

Now, after the discount, the shop was quiet. It was very busy because of 'the super cute mascot.' I thought that things would continue but it turned out that not many customers visited after the special discount ended.

A customer visited us occasionally, but we apologized to them 'sorry, the discount has ended,' so we didn't have much work to do.

"…We're suddenly so free now."

"Kyou-chan, you two should come back to the living room."

"No, I'm fine here."

"I said I would help out."

Both Kirino and I agreed, but our reasons were probably different.

"Thank you. Then how about… we clean this up?"

"Sure."

So we started cleaning. Before an hour had passed, everything was done. Once more we were free.

"How long will your parents take to come back?"

"Around another hour."

……

…So free…

There is – nothing – to do.

I glanced at the counter, only to see Kirino sitting there with one hand on her chin.

"Kirino, are you slacking off?"

"Because there's nothing to do."

Right — I agree.

"That's not a reason to play with your cell phone —"

"Ha? This isn't a cell phone. This is a smartphone."

My little sister always comes up with various excuses to ignore my advice.

Aren't they the same thing?

I wanted to scold Kirino, but Manami interrupted:

"That's okay. My grandpa sometimes does that during work too."

— You meant your senile grandpa?

Manami also sat down and spoke with Kirino.

"Say, Kirino-chan."

"…What?"

Kirino replied, her voice absolutely cold. But Manami kept her usual calm tone.

"What is this 'smartphone?'"

No way… A high school girl shouldn't have to ask something like that……

"…Ah? That… that…"

Even a talented middle school girl would wince when an overly excited high school student asked something like that…

"…How should I put it…?"

Kirino tried to come up with an explanation fitting for this 'ancient person,' and finally she took her smartphone out and demonstrated.

"This… this is a new cell phone, which can allow the user to send a message, surf the web and do a lot of things, alright?"

Kirino sure looked down on Manami. What kind of half-hearted explanation was that?

"Wow… I see ~ Recently young people are so amazing, they all use such 'modern machines.'"

"Granny, please remember that you are still a high school student!"

Well, I have to admit that the way Kirino demonstrated was suited for this 'ancient person.'

"But… But this 'smartphone'… how can I make a call? Are there no buttons…?"

"…Nope, this is a touch screen."

"Touch?"

"Well, it's like…"

"????"

What a difficult battle. Manami didn't understand what a touch screen was, and Kirino had no way to explain it, so she groaned painfully.

"Ah — that's enough."

Kirino whispered in my ear:

"Hey, what's that girl doing…? Is she trying to piss me off?"

"I don't think so. In fact, I think that Manami only wants to improve her niece – granny relationship."

"…What makes you think so?"

Because that is a very appropriate metaphor?

"Ki-Kirino-chan… So… this… That 'smartphone'… and stuff — Can you show me how to use them?"

"Hey, your face is too close…"

Kirini pushed the granny away.

"This — is a game. A game in a smartphone."

"Wow… there are games too."

……Yeah, this sure looks like a granny and her niece.

"What is this… game?"

Hearing this, Kirino showed her screen to Manami:

"This is Imouto-City."

"Imouto-City?"

"Yes, Imouto-City."

"??????"

A huge question mark popped out of Manami's head.

Kirino seemed tired; she stared at me.

"Ah ~ I've had enough! You explain it instead!"

"I have no idea what Imouto-City is about!"

"Haaa??? You don't know Imouto-City? Are you for real?"

Kirino stood up.

"From your reaction, I knew that this was related to 'imouto' somehow."

"Ah — really — no choice then —"

Kirino looked very unwillingly.

"I will explain for you idiot high schooler's what Imouto-City is!"

No thanks.

Do you know where we are now?

"Please! Kirino-chan!"

Manami, there's no need to go along with her.

"Listen well. In short, Imouto-City is like an SNS for a cell phone."

SNS was the network that both you and Saori participated in, right? You exchanged diaries, changed clothes for your internet avatar and made friends online, right?

A year and a half ago — thanks to SNS, Kirino and I were able to meet Saori and Kuroneko.

"S-N-S… Got it. I remember!"

Manami was the one who told me about SNS. How could she not know?

"Imouto-City is a game to play over SNS by cell phone. You could say it's a social game."

"Ah — social game — the ones that are a big hit right now."

"There are people playing them at school too ~"

"Yes, yes. Imouto-City is a little sister based social game!"

"I can see that from the name."

Looked like 'little sister' games were very popular… It's so strange.

"A while ago, I thought that playing games on your cell phone was a waste of time, that only idiots played them! But recently, I heard that Siscalypse is going to be remade into a social game too! So I gave it a try! And then this happened!"

"You got into this that much."

"I have spent more than ¥60 000 in-game."

"Whatttttttt!?"

I yelled:

"You spent ¥60 000 in a cell phone game? That much money?"

What kind of game is that?

"Don't be mistaken! Imouto-City is a basic free-to-play game!"

"Ah, 'basic free-to-play' huh? I can smell that the developer had something in mind."

"It's not like that!"

But isn't that the tradition trick of game developers?

Say — did we talk about something similar before?

"…I get the feeling that I have heard of this before…"

"You think so too?"

Like she wanted to interrupt my conversation with Manami (especially since she didn't know what we were talking about), Kirino added:

"Although Imouto-City is a social game, there is a card based system within the game. By using real money, you have a chance to get special imouto card. This card has a unique background with a super cute little sister!"

"I get it! I get it already!"

"No! You haven't seen the charm of Imouto-City! Take a look! Take a look!"

Kirino showed me the card that cost her ¥60 000. The card name was 'SR [The Golden Tentacles Imouto] Magical Academy Ray.' On the back was setting and additional information.

Wow… Cute… This sure is a beautiful card…

"¥60 000 for this? — Are you an idiot?"

"Ky-Kyou-chan. You shouldn't be so blunt."

"Listen up! A card — fine, a unique card. A special card is still something you can touch. But this ¥60 000 card is only something on your screen! You don't even have anything real!"

"Kuh."

"Wake up Kirino. This isn't a card, just digital data!"

"We've talked about this ten years ago —"

*Slap*

"That hurt."

She really slapped me.



"Kirino you idiot… There were no social games ten years ago."

"Ha? You're exaggerating. Apologize immediately!"

"To who?"

"To my unique card!"

…Oh crap… my little sister has gone berserk…

"I already know that this card is only digital data! But listen to me well —"

Kirino thrust her finger at my face:

"This card is also real!"

"Where?"

*Whack* Kirino beat on her own chest.

"In my heart!"

"……"

What a waste of an epic line……

"I already know that… this girl is digital data, the clothes are digital data, and some day it will disappear. My hard trained stats will become meaningless one day, and one day that card will disappear forever; leaving me empty handed."

Kirino closed her eyes and said in an elegant voice:

"The joy I had when I played it won't disappear. Her face will forever remain in my heart — I will absolutely not forget her."

Kirino looked up and smiled.

Her face showed that she didn't regret spending that much money one bit.

"I have no regrets about it. Absolutely none."

"But that's still ¥60 000…"

That was my conclusion.

After that, Manami's parent came back and replaced us. We went to the living room and prepared for lunch.

"Sorry for troubling you."

"It's fine. I'm the one who should thank you for your trouble."

We were chatting while working.

"Hey, hey, am I suitable to be a housewife?"

This idiot kept talking nonsense.

"Ha, just wait until you can make a decent Japanese meal."

"Ha? I could do it if I tried —!"

"Idiot — it's not as easy as it sounds."

I often helped out with that too, so I knew. Choosing the right ingredients wasn't an easy task.

"Manami can make a rabbit or turtle shaped meal, she is amazing."

"Why do you sound so proud? It's not like she's your girlfriend or anything."

"Maybe she isn't my girlfriend, but she is my childhood friend."

"Ah, ah? K-Kyou-chan?"

Manami blushed in embarrassment.

"Hmph."

Somehow, Kirino seemed unhappy. Seeing that, Manami changed the topic.

"Say — Kirino-chan, you changed your hair style."

"— Yeah — so?"

She brushed her hair. 'This is — the preparation before facing the final boss' like Kirino said.

Did she mean this talk with Manami? But comparing Manami to a final boss is too far off.

"You too Manami, did you change your hair style too?"

"— Ah?"

Manami stared at me.

Her reaction was bigger than I thought, so I was kind of panicked.

"Ah… what?"

"Uhm… the truth is I wanted to grow it out… but it still wasn't long enough… Then a while ago I visited a beauty salon……"

After beating around the bush, Manami finally concluded:

"Kyou-chan… you noticed?"

"Yup."

After hearing my answer, my little sister grit her teeth as she took a deep breath.

"You are so horrible. If you noticed, why didn't you say so?"

"Ah! But I just said it —"

"Are you an idiot? You have to say it immediately when you notice."

"That is because…!" — Changing my mind, I said: "…You are right."

I reflected on myself and told Manami.

"Sorry Manami. Also — this new hair style isn't bad… maybe long hair suits you."

"…Thank goodness."

She let out a sigh of relief.

"Thank you Kyou-chan. I'm very happy for your praise —"

"No, no, it's not anything worth thanking me for…"

I scratched the back of my head and glanced aside, only to meet my little sister's eyes.

…What a cold gaze…

"…Aren't you an honest one."

Her eyes seemed to say 'your attitude was so different when I changed my hair style.'

(Hey, I did praise you — right after you came back from the beauty salon!)

(Ha? Did you think that was enough!?)

Yeah, we siblings can now fight without the need to open our mouths.

"Ha……"

It can't be helped. Even though it's so embarrassing, I should just speak my true feelings.

I felt my face getting hotter and spoke in a tone that both of them could hear.

"You are right. When I quarreled with Manami, Kirino hastily rebuked me, saying that I cared too little about a change in a girl's appearance, so this time —"

Allow me to care for you two — that's what I was about to say.

"Well, even now you aren't much better."

I'm such a useless man.

"I see. So that was Kirino-chan…"

Manami smiled with Kirino. But Kirino turned her head away.

"…It's nothing. I just said what should be said."

Seeing them talking with each other, I muttered:

"So nostalgic."

"What?"

"Nostalgic?"

"No, I just wanted to say it. The last time Kirino came here — you two were like this too."

A few years ago, Kirino and Manami — there was some distance between them, but they cared for each other — just like siblings.

And then… I don't know when it began, but their relationship deteriorated into this sinister state.

When did that happen?

In my memory, there was a time when Kirino suddenly refused to come to Manami's house no matter what… No…

I don't know. Was it when Kirino and I almost stopped talking, so we didn't invite her with us anymore? What happened first; Kirino and I entering a cold war, or Kirino refusing to come to Tamura's house?

Well, whichever, it's fine.

"I have decided I want to restore your relationship to what it was like before. Absolutely."

"Absolutely? Don't say something like that so casually. We turned out like this — there were unspeakable circumstances."

I knew that much. But I hated it. So I had decided.

I laughed. My next words came out without thinking.

"Kirino. In this world, you can't just say 'it's impossible' to deal with past problems."

"————"

Both Kirino's and Manami's eyes widened.

"What?"

"No… You… That was…"

"—That was like the Kyou-chan of the past."

I was shocked. I only noticed it because they said it out loud. Yes, during my time in middle school, I often said something like that with some minor differences.

In this world… there's nothing that can't be done!

Ha……

"Sorry, I don't get it."

I was so arrogant back then. It must be that the 'visit Tamura's household with Kirino' trip that caused me to remember such a thing. I could almost see my past self.

"……"

Both Kirino and I looked into the house. As usual, this place was filled with a granny's atmosphere. Even though she hadn't come here in a long time, Kirino probably felt it too.

"Kirino-chan…Thank you so much for coming."

"Well… I had accepted the agreement…"

"Yes. Everyone will be happy to see Kirino-chan again."

…That's right. Kirino — was loved by Manami's grandparents.

"My grandpa was sleeping earlier. He should be up by now."

"Because he could smell lunch?"

He's a big eater.

In the dining room, Manami's family was waiting for us.

The first one to react was Grandpa.

"Ah —! Kirino-chan! Long time no see —!"

Kirino smiled wryly and bowed.

"Ahaha… it has been a long time."

"Ah—! You are so beautiful! Isn't she, Granny?"

"Yes, she is."

Granny smiled. When Manami is that old, she probably will be the same kind granny too.

"It has been a long time. How are you?"

Kirino greeted everyone. Then Manami's granddad made a pose and pointed at me:

"Hey, hey! Kyou-chan! You Casanova!"

"Ya?"

"Don't 'ya' with me… Hahaha… I heard that ~ you got a girlfriend, but she dumped you afterwards, right?"

"Kuh…!"

Don't put your hand on my shoulder, old man.

"You deserved it ~ I already gave you Manami! Right? Right?"

"Ga-Grandpa!!!"

Manami panicked —

This usual scene continued. While Manami's grandpa was talking with me, Granny called to Kirino:

"Kirino-chan, Kirino-chan. Come here — I will give you some lucky money."

"Ah? But isn't it still December?"

Kirino shot me a glance, asking 'Is she senile?' I made a hand signal, answering, 'Of course not! She isn't! …Probably!'

"Ah, here is your lucky money for last year too. It has been so long since Kirino-chan has come here."

"Ah, I can't accept it!"

"Ah ah, kids shouldn't think too much — isn't that right, Grandpa?"

"Yes, yes! Take it! Kirino-chan."

Kirino glanced at me again. I smiled wryly and nodded.

"— Thank you very much…"

Kirino smiled warmly and took the lucky money.

"Ahaha… So nostalgic."

"Yes, yes."

Granny gently pat Kirino. Both of them smiled — I never thought I would see this scene again.

Hmm? Did I forget someone? Just when I was thinking about it, I heard footsteps outside. The door opened…

"I heard that aniki came?"

"Ah, Rock. I feel like I haven't seen you in years."

"Aniki! It has only been a few months!"

"Maybe."

This is Tamura Iwao… but everyone calls him Rock. He is Manami's younger brother. We call him that because he is bald — ah?

"Hey Rock, you grew hair."

What is with that? Not only Kirino, Manami, Ayase —

Even this guy? Well, forget it, he is still Rock.

"Hm hmph… Sorry aniki… I'm not Rock anymore…"

"Now, I'm — Super Rock!"

He made a ridiculous pose.

"Yeah, yeah I know."

He is still the same — good.

I can't believe that he is the same age as Kirino.

"Oh my……"

For some reason Manami seemed angry.

Strange. Manami should be very kind to her younger brother.

"Ah, Super Rock-san. It has been a long time since you've met Kirino, right?"

"Who?"

Rock paused for a second, and then…

"Ah — ah!!!"

His eyes almost popped out of their sockets, he pointed at Kirino.

"You! Why… why —"

Rock was very surprised. Seeing Rock, Kirino said in a blank tone.

"Ah, traitor."

"——"

After he recovered (which took a while), Rock timidly asked:

"…Could it be… you still do it…?"

"Hmm, it doesn't matter anyway."

Kirino… Did she just call Rock a 'traitor?'

I didn't understand the situation, but Rock muttered:

"…Isn't it better to say it out loud… Really...? Ah… really…"

Rock sighed… and then he spoke as if he was talking to a kid.

"That… It has been a long time already. We are both in middle school now, right?"

I couldn't believe my ears… Rock was treating Kirino like a kid.

Rock told Kirino to hurry and grow up…

"……"

Kirino didn't reply, her was expression blank. I sighed and asked Rock:

"What happened between you two?"

"Ah, that was! We —"

" — Try saying it."

Kirino interrupted.

"Ugh!"

Interrupted, Rock turned to Manami —

"A a a a a a a a! I can't!"

He screamed. I was even more puzzled than before.

"Hey, what is going on?"

"Sorry Kyou-chan! Please release me! I will take this secret with me to the grave!"

Weren't you about to say it before Kirino interrupted you?

I can't understand you.

Afterward, Rock clearly tried to avoid Kirino by going back to his room.

…So in the end, I couldn't do anything about their secret.

"Are you two going to stay here tonight?"

When Manami said that, we had spent more than an hour in the dining room. Because of Rock, Kirino was quite unhappy so she was spending time with Grandpa and Granny. However, because of that, my original goal 'to let Kirino and Manami talk with each other' couldn't be achieved. The sun had already set — that's when Manami asked if we were staying.

"Ah? You mean Kirino and me?"

"Of course."

Next to me, Manami smiled and nodded.

"Grandpa seems like he still has a lot to say to Kirino-chan. I don't want to disturb them. Also —"

"Also —?"

"I want to… talk with Kirino… tonight…"

A discussion between Kirino and Manami. Even though I wanted them to make up, I highly doubted it would be that easy.

"A discussion between Kirino and Manami……"

I glanced at Kirino who was talking with Granny, and by coincidence our eyes met.

"…Ah."

Kirino quickly averted her eyes.

…What is with you? Even though I'm talking with Manami, your reaction isn't normal.

Not to mention, why did you avert your eyes when they met Manami's, why were you shaken when you saw mine?

I don't get it.

In regards to staying at Tamura's house I thought that Kirino would be troubled, but she nodded without saying anything.

"— In that case, sorry for the trouble."

How many years has it been since the last time Kirino slept here?

After dinner, we went back to the sleeping room. It was the same room that I slept in before. Although it was still too soon to sleep, this place is more suitable for 'a talk' than the dining room.

Three of us entered the room…

"……"

Both Kirino and I looked at Manami in silence.

"Hey… Manami."

"The three of us will spend time here tonight — Alright, seems like we will have a lot of time."

"Good. I have no problem with that."

If my little sister who was the one most likely to throw a tantrum said so, then I don't have a problem.

"Heehee."

Manami sat down in the middle of the room. Kirino also sat down and she picked up one of the books nearby.

"This is —"

"The old photo album."

Ah, so you want to talk about the past.

"Please wait for me to bring some snacks."

Manami left the room… she looked like she expected a long battle.

…The room was filled with silence.

Kirino opened the album in silence and stopped at a page.

"You… Do you remember this, back then?"

She pointed at a picture.

"Let me take a look."

It was a picture of when the Tamura family and I went flower watching.

"It reads 'to celebrate graduation' — so that picture was five years ago?"

It was probably taken when I graduated from elementary school.

Kirino wasn't there… Why?

"Did you remember something?"

"Ah, uhm, that —"

I tried to recall my memory —

That was when I just graduated from elementary school, but before I entered middle school — during spring break.

In front of me, there was a small elementary kid that knelt down. His head almost touched the ground.

"Aniki — I was wrong"

"Huh? What is with you?"

Seeing this idiot suddenly kneeling like that, I almost spat. It was Tamura Iwao — he was like a younger brother to me… But recently he didn't talk to me much. Still with his elementary school student hair style, he banged his head on the floor and kept apologizing.

"Please forgive me!"

"Forgive what?"

I was telling the truth. What have you done to me?

Iwao looked up:

"When I shit carelessly at school, you helped me!"

I kicked him.

"That hurt!?"

"You bastard ~~~~ don't remind me of that event!"

That was one of my worst experiences during elementary school. The graduation ceremony was drawing near, but I was cleaning up his feces in the corridor. I brought him to the infirmary, gave him my spare gym clothes, rushed into his classroom to deliver a speech and even had a fight with his classmate — a lot of things.

And it was so damn smelly!

"But, aniki, you are the one who asked me what I was talking about."

"Shut up. That had already ended, so don't speak about it anymore —"

"But, but…"

"No buts."

I pulled Iwao up by his arm and said:

"Listen to me, Iwao. I don't feel happy because you knelt — in contrast, I feel very troubled. Alright, from now on… if you meet someone in trouble, just like you once were, be sure to help them. Even if it is troublesome, even if it's hard, but don't tell me that you can't do it or it's impossible. I can't accept such useless excuses."

In this world you can't just say 'it's impossible' to deal with past problems.

"For me, helping others in need is something to look forward to. I'd feel happy if you could help someone. If that person continued to help someone else —"

I scratched my nose and smiled:

"Doesn't that mean I also helped that person?"

"…I understand! Aniki!"

"Good! Then let's stop here."

"Ah… no… there is…"

"Hmph? Is there anything else?"

"Uhm… uhm…"

Was there another reason for Iwao to kneel in front of me?

"I… I am angry with you, aniki."

"Ah?"

What the heck?

"Did I do something?

Although I had looked down on Iwao's forgetfulness, that was a long time ago.

I couldn't think of any reason for him to be angry with me?

"……"

Iwao looked down. Then he whispered:

"Aniki, you didn't do anything wrong. That anger was purely from me."

"I don't get it — what do you mean?"

"My Onee-chan! I'm angry because you have such a good relationship with onee-chan!"

————— "Onee-chan… you mean Manami?"

"Yes! I feel like aniki took onee-chan away from me… I feel so frustrated… So I'm angry at you."

"Ah!"

Now I remember.

"Ah ah ~~ I remember one time that you suddenly said you wanted to fight against me"

Of course, I replied in kind.

"Don't worry; I have no intention of taking Manami away from you."

"Yes. I realized that when aniki beat me up. I was an idiot — a huge idiot. Aniki, you are so kind — you are my dream…"

"Hahahaha!"

I love it when people praise me.

"So, it's fine no matter what aniki does to onee-chan"

"Ha? What are you talking about?"

"That time —"

"That time?"

"I succeeded in changing Rock's mind."

Kirino lied down.

"But that's not important…"

"Still…"

Don't say that, he is like another younger brother to me.

Kirino pursed her mouth.

"Well, although he's not completely unrelated… In this case, why don't you remember my story? Why don't you?"

Why do you have to make it so hard to understand…?

"During that time, you…"

I knit my brow and tried to remember.

"…It wasn't like that…"

"Huh?"

"…At that time… you and me… we didn't ignore each other like now."

"…Then why did it change? Do you remember?"

"…About that…"

Why? Why did we stop talking to each other?

Although our cold war had already begun by that point, we didn't completely ignore each other like now.

It would be more accurate to say —

"I was the one who deliberately kept a distance between us."

"Yes… you are starting to remember."

I'm an adult now, I won't play with you anymore —

That was… probably during my third year in elementary school, that sentence was always on the tip of my tongue. Every time I left for school Kirino grit her teeth and sent her aniki off by saying 'please take care.'

That was normal. Not only is our gender different, we are three years apart. We can't play with each other too much. Everyone in elementary school knew it too.

In the later part of elementary school, if a boy and a girl played together, people would tease them and say that they liked each other — or worse, saying that the boy is a Casanova — that was how it was back then.

If you did that, you would become a laughing stock for everyone.

Even I unconsciously accepted that. There was a time when I avoided Manami too. She didn't come to look for me, probably for the same reason.

However, every weekend, I took my little sister to Manami's house.

At that time, I still called Manami 'Tamura-chan.'

"Tamura-chan! Let's play! Let's play!"

" — Welcome, Kyou-chan, Kirino-chan."

Those days continued until…

Ah? Recently Kirino seemed to be in her rebellious stage.

We would only play together at Manami's home, but she always acted odd and threw tantrums.

"What are you angry for?"

"Go to hell! Idiot!"

Just like that.

"Ha? I don't get it."

In my memory, the Kirino of that time was a girl who could get angry easily.

I didn't know if that was a coincidence or not, but at the same time, that idiot Rock got angry with me and challenged me to a fight. Although he reflected on it later…

Kirino's resistance kept increasing. To the point that she refused to go anywhere with Manami. That was why there was no pictures of her in this album.

— I remembered. Kirino stopped going to Manami's home when I was in the fifth grade of elementary school… before I entered middle school.

Not bad, thanks to all that chit chat I have started remembering…

"— Why did you refuse to go to Manami's home back then?"

I don't know when, but Kirino had already started playing with her smartphone.

She's probably playing that game, Imouto-City, again.

"You were busy back then. And I had something to do too."

"Something to do…? Like playing with your friends?"

"Nope – haaaaa???? I lost????"

"Hey, don't play a game while we're talking."

We are having an important talk here!

"Wait, wait… Just wait a bit!"

Kirino kept her eyes on her smartphone.

"Are you kidding me? This character is way too strong! How could you beat my Reika card…?!"

She spent ¥60 000 and she still lost… Truly, there is someone who is crazier than her…

"Ah — impossible! They took the event reward from me! Hm, curse this golden key! Spending that much money on a game — are you an idiot!?"

You aren't in a position to say that.

…Ha……

"In the end, Imouto-City is just a game for people with a lot of extra money."

"It was basically that, but recently, the newest update added some changes. They called it 'collaboration battle system,' which allowed players to receive reinforcements or opponents from another game. It's possible to fight with a character from Sis X Sis or Meruru."

"Ha —"

I didn't get it at all. All I knew was that this girl was neck-deep in that game.

"Even though I was defeated despite my ultra-rare card, this must be a long-time player. He might even have some unique cards."

I have to play some other games aside from Siscalypse — Kirino muttered.

You are caught in the company's trap…

"…Ha."

Kirino's idea of a 'long-time player' probably means a few years.

Imouto-City — I have heard of that game before. No wonder it sounded so familiar.

"……"

"…Hey."

When I was deep in thought, I was knocked back into reality by that sound.

"Ha…!"

I don't know when, but Kirino had crawled up to me, her face inches away from mine.

"Yes?"

I panicked.

"Did you ask me why I was busy back then?"

"Yes…"

Don't suddenly change the topic like that.

"I already showed it to you before I went to America."

"— Showed me what?"

"My secret."

Don't make it so vague. As if Kirino could read my mind, she said:

"The reason I started to practice running."

"Ah."

I remembered that — back then, Kirino was very bad at exercise.

"Because something pissed me off, so I started to practice running — that's why."

"I remember."

"What —"

That's normal. How could I forget that day before you disappeared?

"You were busy because you had to practice running?"

"Not only that. Studying. Dressing. Making friends — I've been doing my best since then."

……

"Now that I think about it, you always seemed to be angry back then. Could it be that the reason for that and the reason for you trying your best…?"

"They were the same."

"I see."

That was the important factor here.

"During that time, because of a reason that made you angry, you did your best with running, studying and fashion. That was why you were so busy that you couldn't hang out with us."

"Yes. Besides, even if I went I would have felt nothing but frustration."

"— What made you that angry?"

I tried a direct question.

At first, I thought it was because everyone teased her about how slow she was. But the reason must be related to me and Manami somehow. I had to get a clear answer.

I looked seriously into my little sister's eyes. And then —

"…I don't want to say."

"Hey."

You're still so stubborn even now?

Still in her crawling position, Kirino moved back a little and looked away.

"Because… if I said it… someone will get full of himself."

"Who?"

"You."

……Stop stalling! I wanted to yell, but I remained calm and asked:

"But… But it was an important reason, right? Is it okay to not tell me that?"

"It's fine."

Kirino sighed as she lied down on the floor.

"If you don't talk, we can't continue —"

A few second of silence…

Kirino looked around. She seemed to be deep in thought.

Then her lips moved…

"It was a very long time ago… When I was still a kid."

Five years is a very long time, huh?

"Do you get it!?"

"Yeah, yeah, of course."

Why are you angry now?

"You must not get full of yourself, got it! And don't make up some weird misunderstanding."

"I get it already!"

How many times do you have to repeat yourself, imouto-sama?

I frowned. For some reason Kirino started rolling on the floor.

"Ah — damn — What happened — really?!"

She even hugged her head in frustration.

"Don't cause a ruckus here. The people on the first floor will hear us."

Looks like this 'something that pissed me off' is something that Kirino truly hates.

After a while, Kirino lied motionless in a 大 shape.

"Ha… Fine."

Kirino closed her eyes and stood up.

She placed her hands on her knees and gripped them tightly.

And then — she looked down and muttered:

"Back then — I was a brocon."

"Okay, I see."

"Ha???"

Kirino looked up in shock:

"What's with your reaction? Why aren't you surprised?"

"Because I already know."

"What…"

Or to be more accurate, back then, I already knew.

"Well, it was pretty obvious back then."

But Kirino was still shocked from my reaction. Her expression was as if I just saw her underwear. Since she didn't say anything, I kept talking about the past.

" Onii-chan, play with me — you once followed me like that every day."

"I… I didn't."

"Yes you did."

"I never did! I stopped calling you 'onii-chan' since my second year!"

"…Wow, you sure remember trivial stuff."

"…Ha!"

My little sister's eyes widened. But she quickly recovered and coughed.

"When I said 'back then' I meant during my third and fourth year! I already called you 'aniki' at that time! I'm a brocon — but I'm not calling you 'onii-chan.' Don't be mistaken!"

"Right, right. Sorry, sorry."

Why do you have to deny it so strongly? Is it that important to you, Kirino?

Still…I felt so nostalgic…Those times from the past kept surfacing in my mind.

"At that time, our relationship wasn't that bad. You were —"

"…What?"

"…It's nothing."

"Hey, finish your sentence!"

Yeah, yeah.

"You were very cute, unlike now… It doesn't have any special meaning!"

"Haaaa!?"

See? I didn't want to say it because you got angry.

"You were so stubborn back then. When I said I couldn't play with you anymore, you immediately cried. To be honest, it was so troublesome."

"…Didn't I tell you to not get full of yourself?"

"But that was so long ago."

"Still…"

" — Back then, I thought that you were so troublesome, so I bullied you. After that you stopped following me — Ah wait — Could it be — 'something that pissed you off so much' — is because I said you were troublesome and refused to play with you anymore — was that the reason?"

It couldn't be. My little sister — she tried so hard because of that —?

"…Is that true?"

Kirino didn't answer me, she lowered her voice.

"Is that all you remember?"

"Ah… Aaaagrh!"

I replied honestly, but she pulled my cheek.

"That hurts!"

"So noisy!"

Still pulling my cheek, Kirino said:

"…Although that did happen, I still got angry because you said it."

I took this chance to get a better look at my little sister's face. Compared to five years ago, she is more mature now.

Kirino sighed and released me.

"Back then… no matter how much I cried, you always ran away. You bullied me by saying — 'if you can catch me, I will play with you.'"

" — Did I really do that?"

"Yes. I always tried to run after you… but… But I couldn't keep up… so I fell… I could only watch your back getting further and further away from me… I was all alone… Then I realized that I didn't know where I was."

"……"

"I was scared… So scared… I cried… But no one came to help me…"

Kirino painfully said:

"Not only that… I felt regret —"

Recalling that day, Kirino closed her eyes and bit her lips.

"Imagine what I felt back then."

"Yeah…"

I threw away the annoying little sister to play with male friends.

Yes, back then I did that. But I would still help my little sister if she fell, so… I must not have paid attention back then.

— Onii-chan. I'm crying, but you won't help me.

— Onii-chan threw me away, he doesn't care about me anymore.

The brocon Kirino back then probably thought that.

Kirino looked up again.

"I didn't tell you that to get an apology from you."

"I will not apologize."

I looked into her eyes.

"Now, you are faster than me."

The one who is left behind is me.

I stood up and smiled with my little sister.

"You are amazing. You have left me behind already."

"Hmph."

Kirino looked away. I felt a little embarrassment too.

"So, you started practicing running because…"

"To run faster than you."

"I see."

"Because I wanted to let you taste what I felt back then someday."

"I see."

Why didn't I realize this until now?

Long ago, didn't Ria tell me the answer already.

Kirino — had reached her goal.

Before she went to America, I told her:

"If we have a race now, I couldn't win against you."

Then she replied proudly:

"Ah, I felt so comfortable."

Kirino smiled, satisfied. I didn't understand it back then.

So that is why…

Running, modelling, studying……

"— Everything you've done was to leave me behind… wasn't it?"

"Ha? Don't get full of yourself."

Kirino opened her eyes.

"Huh?"

"Everything was just by chance — I turned them into my advantages."

"I knew it."

You are so amazing now because of your efforts.

That's totally true.

"— Good."

At first, Kirino only wanted to leave me behind — but then she tried her best for herself.

So she got angry with me and stopped following me.

— The reason was so simple.

...And…

"Was that the reason — our relationship became bad?"

If that is true, then we were both idiots. One siblings' quarrel led to a cold war — I couldn't believe it.

My chest hurt, but Kirino shook her head.

"No, it wasn't."

She paused before she continued:

"Although it was partly because of that, it isn't the main reason. True, I was very angry; so much that I even changed my life style —"

"— How could I hate my onii-chan because of that."

Kirino's 'onii-chan' that she just said wasn't the 'me' who's in front of her —

She would call me 'Kousaka Kyousuke.'

"That event pissed me off so much that I started running, thus reducing the time we spent together — but I was still a brocon. I started a cold war with you much later."

I heard Kirino, but I was still speechless.

Because……

"…Why are you so surprised? You didn't expect me to tell you that much?"

It was partly because of that, but the main reason that rendered me speechless is……

My little sister's words — 'How could I hate my onii-chan because of that' — such a powerful sentence.

I couldn't say anything.

My little sister cannot be this cute.

Do you want to kill me with your cuteness?

Seeing me speechless, Kirino smiled and said, "Ah, I understand your feelings." She was wrong, but it didn't matter.

I would die of embarrassment if she knew what is going on in my mind.

My heart was still in chaos, but Kirino reverted back to her serious state.

"Up until now, I have been honest and frank with you."

Kirino looked at me.

Her eyes told me that what she was about to say would be very important.

"But now isn't the time. There is no chance of winning now."

"I see."

I didn't say anything.

She is changing every day.

She had changed so much compared to back then.

Maybe I could learn something from her.

Tonight… is the second time we'll have a talk.

I failed on our first talk, but this time, I won't make the wrong choice.

……

We were filled with a quiet atmosphere, but then the door opened.

"Sorry to keep you waiting."

Manami had returned.

"I brought snacks and tea — what were you talking about?"

Kirino glared at Manami and said:

"Next — let's talk about what happened three years ago."

"I see. Where should we start?"

"Wherever you like. Because even now… I still don't know what happened back then."

"Okay... Kyou-chan."

"Yes?"

"Let's talk about what 'happened three years ago.' About what Kirino-chan doesn't know."

# Chapter 2


第二章

More than a year ago, when Kirino confided her problems in me, I said that I wasn't 'suitable' to give her life counseling. But that was not actually the case. To tell the truth, 'me from that time' thought that he wasn't suitable for the job — but long before that, during my middle school year, I already had a habit of butting into other people's affairs. Of course, the first time I heard the word 'life counseling' was from Kirino.

The prototype for Kousaka Kyousuke's life consultation… was long ago… I think that it was when I first entered middle school.

To tell the truth, I was an idiot back then. I was a brat who liked to play superhero and liked making paper swords. I believed in my adult-like ability, my groundless self-confidence and my own childish justice.

I looked down on Rock and might have looked down on the angel 'Kamineko' too.

That was me back then — such a miserable boy. Such a hot-blooded boy — I couldn't understand myself at that time. I think everyone has a time like that too… No, my case was a special case.

I could still do many things, so where did my unlimited enthusiasm go?

Everyone's 'golden time' is usually filled with regrets.

Three years ago, September.

The ground was as hot as a frying pan but at least the sky was clear.

In this weather, my little sister and I went to school together.

Kousaka Kyousuke, middle school, third year. Kousaka Kirino, elementary school, sixth year.

Before the cold war between the Kousaka siblings.

Our route to school split later, but before that, chatting with my little sister was unavoidable.

" — In short, when the new semester started, I had already solved three big incidents!"

"Ah! Everyone is depending on aniki!"

Hearing my little sister praise me, I felt satisfied and continued:

"Of course. I have been the class rep since first year."

"Wow, class rep and a member of student council… You really are helping others. You mean like a 'sket group'?"

That is something only found in a manga! 'The current me' would undoubtedly say so.

But at that time, I replied:

"Mhm — that's right!"

"My school is making plans for a new system. Each class will have a 'grade manual'. Everyone will write their ideas into that and the school hopes to get a better view of students. Then, the class rep is responsible to confirm it periodically."

"Uhm!"

"By looking at that book, I'll find something that a class rep can do and get rid of it."

I really liked to use some exaggerated words.

"The biggest incident recently was a rumor that during the summer break, there was 'someone who destroyed a classroom.'"

During the summer break, some club members found out that someone had destroyed a classroom, so they wrote it down. On the first day of the new school year, I snuck into the school at night to catch the culprit.

I succeeded! I succeeded catching him! Wow, hahahaha, I am amazing!

Although it was just a stray dog.

"Aniki, Dad was so angry with you."

"So noisy."

Dad beat me up, which was still hurting now. He thought that I should have just left that problem for a teacher or family — well, he was right anyway.

"But thanks to aniki, everyone feels safer now."

"It's good if that's the case."

I showed my little sister a bright smile despite my face being covered in band-aids.

Since we almost had to split, Kirino didn't follow behind me anymore but walked side by side with me. To tell the truth — I felt relieved — a few minutes chatting with my little sister is not a bad thing. It was more troublesome at home…

When the route split, Kirino waved her red backpack and smiled:

"I'm going that way."

"Right."

"I'm going ~~"

"See ya."

My little sister left. A few minutes later, I heard a familiar voice calling my name.

"Good morning, Kyou-chan ~"

It was my childhood friend, Tamura Manami, with her usual glasses.

"Right ~"

I waved my hand.

Seeing my band-aid covered face, Manami looked horrified.

"Wow… You are hurt so bad… Are you okay?"

"It hurts a lot — my teacher told my Dad that I lied to him in order to sneak into the school at night — so I turned into this."

Hearing that, Manami seemed to be unhappy.

"Hm…"

She looked angry.

"I think that was Kyou-chan's fault."

"Hey, you still say that?"

'The hero Kyousuke caught a stray dog' incident happened last week, and only my teacher and a handful of students knew about it. Manami was one of them.

"But that was dangerous. You snuck into the school at night — What if it really was a bad guy?"

"In that case, I would run to the police. I won't do something dangerous."

"…Really, Kyou-chan. Your Dad was just worried about you. Me too —"

"Right, right, I get it."

Her speeches were always long. She looked like a kid, but her mental age was like a granny.

"…Anyways, don't do anything dangerous, okay? If Kyou-chan gets hurt… I'm going to cry."

"Hey, don't cry now!"

Seeing her teary eyes, I quickly apologized to her.

"Sorry! That was my fault! Don't cry!"

"…Wa… Wah…"

I'm done for. She really cried! How could this girl cry so easily? And why is she crying? Is it because my band-aid covered face scares her?

I gently stroked Manami's back and gave her my handkerchief.

"Here, clean yourself."

Manami took her glass off and wiped her tears.

"Ah… now I want to cry too…"

Although it was hard to believe, but I really felt so. I cried when Dad beat me up, but from an emotional point of view, I want to cry now more than before.

"Me too!"

"—"

"I'd rather myself get hurt than let Kyou-chan get hurt! Kyou-chan made me feel that way, and those people who praised you — I hate you all!"

Manami half shouted:

"I see."

We agreed on this topic.

If Manami did something similar to me, I would explode too.

I understood. I yelled at the top of my lungs:

"Sorry for making you worried. Thank you for worrying about me."

"……"

"I promise you that I won't do anything dangerous again."

"…Really?"

With her moist eyes, Manami looked at me. Maybe because she just cried, her face was slightly red.

I smiled:

"Yes."

Because…

"Because I'm the class rep, I can't do something that will make my classmate cry."

"……"

"…Hey, why aren't you looking at me?"

Wasn't that a cool line?

"I don't care anymore." Manami turned her face to the side and muttered, "…Kyou-chan is always like that, you are so kind, so gentle, always tries to do his best for anyone with enthusiasm…… That's why everyone trusts you."

"Isn't that a good thing?"

I was happy. Everyone was happy too.

But — Manami gently shook her head.

"No… At least, not for me."

"?"

Manami wiped her tears away and turned back into my normal childhood friend.

"…Don't push yourself too hard, Kyou-chan."

Ha? What are you saying?

"I never push myself too hard."

That same day, during lunch, I took a look at my 'grade manual.'

"Okay, let's see what kind of 'request' I received today."

Although it sounded like a big request for a school, but in fact most of them were just trivial matters. A stair corner is too dirty. The male's toilet is unbearable…… Things like that…

Normally, the class rep would gather those requests and send them to the school. But I didn't think so. I felt that it would be better if I could take care of them quickly. In fact, I already did that before.

Of course, I didn't take care of everything. Many of them — to put it bluntly, were 'boring'. I was slowly reading the 'grade manual'…

[Since the beginning of this year, someone still hasn't come to school. I'm worried.]

"Ya, ya, leave it to me!"

I slammed on the table and stood up.

Then I noticed that everyone was staring at me. Some even laughed.

"Hm…"

I paid them no attention, instead I just sat down.

"…Kyou-chan, what happened?"

Manami came and asked me.

Good, I can ask her some questions too.

I showed her the page from the 'grade manual.'

Seeing this, Manami was surprised.

"Ah —"

"Do you know who is it?"

"Er? Kyou-chan, you are the class rep yet you don't know?"

"Nope."

If I knew, I would already act.

Hearing that, Manami sighed and said:

"— This is about Sakurai Akimi-san."

It seemed that was the name of my classmate who hadn't come to school.

"You don't know her?"

"Sakurai-san… No, I don't."

"Hey, but she is famous in our class!"

"Really?"

"Yes."

"Well, I have no interest in girls."

I preferred playing with boys.

"So… Kyou-chan has no interest in girls…"

"Not exactly, but isn't it embarrassing to talk with a girl?"

"But… you always speak with me?"

"You are a special case."

" — Ah!"

Manami's eyes widened in surprised.

"We have been together for so long, I think of you as family."

"Ah — uhm… That's right."

Somehow, Manami seemed angry. My childhood friend is so unpredictable. Recently, her actions made even less sense to me.

I showed a puzzled expression and looked at Manami's face.

"Really, Kyou-chan is an idiot."

"So, what is Sakurai-san like?"

If she is popular then you should know.

Manami went 'uhm' and continued:

"Sakurai-san… She is very cute and smart. In fact, she was the one with the highest grades during our first year."

"Oh? Is she good with exercise too?"

"Ahaha, not really, exercise is not something she is good at."

So she wasn't perfect.

Manami continued:

"I heard that she is actually a high-class lady."

"Cute. Smart. Rich. What is with that perfect girl?"

She seemed like a character from a manga to me.

"What is her character like?"

"Sorry, I don't know……"

"Alright, so this Sakurai… doesn't come to school?"

"Seems so. I heard that during the first semester, she didn't come to school once… Everyone is worried."

"Alright… I see…"

I was surprised with myself.

I'm the class rep, but I didn't even know about her existence. It's like I'm a heartless bastard.

"…Alright… I get it."

I glanced at the 'grade manual'.

[Since the beginning of this year, someone still hasn't come to school. I'm worried.]

"Haha… Just leave it to me."

"Well, I knew that Kyou-chan would act this way."

Of course. I have always been acting this way.

I pointed at that page and smiled:

"Good. Bring Sakurai Akimi back to school is my job!"

"…Did you remember what I said before?"

"Ah sure, sure. I won't do anything dangerous nor will I try to act tough."

"…That's good then."

What do you mean, Manami?

"There is nothing dangerous about this. I could make everyone happy. That's my duty as a class rep. Do you have anything to say?"

"…Don't you think that it would be very troublesome to make someone who has stopped going to school go to school again?"

"That's why." I happily said: "If I could do something that even the teacher can't, then aren't I amazing?"

Noticing that I was waiting for her reaction, Manami thought for a few seconds and smiled:

"Yes. That's right."

"I know, right?" I grinned. "Anyway, today I will ask the teacher about her and visit her home after school."

"I understand."

Manami slightly nodded.

"Be careful on your way, Kyou-chan… Don't push yourself too hard."

As usual.

After school.

After talking with my teacher, he finally showed me Sakurai-san's picture.

I was amazed at myself — to be able to convince my teacher — he probably thought, 'I was right to choose this boy as the class rep'.

However, before we left, his eyes were a little cold.

"Alright…"

I walked out of the facility office and double checked her address.

"Hey, hey… That far?"

I went back home to change into a new set of clothes and rode my bicycle to her home.

After about ten minutes — I had arrived in her area.

"Alright!"

I stopped and looked around to find her home. From the surrounding addresses, her home should have been nearby…

"It should be… here… Wow so big…"

I looked at Sakurai's house. Although my house was big, this one was way bigger.

"Next, I should go meet her in person."

If she had a problem, I'd help her solve it. Of course going into her home like that and asking her directly 'Why haven't you gone to school?' is out of the question. I had prepared a reason to visit her, which was 'to give her a photocopy of the notebooks'. Besides, I didn't bring them all with me, so I can use that reason again and again… Hm hm… I was so intelligent.

"Hey!"

*Ding dong*. I pressed the door bell

But after a while, no one came.

"Ha?"

No matter how many times I tried, no one came out.

"Don't tell me I wasted my time!" I muttered. Going back home now was too much of a waste of time.

"Let's take a detour to the game center."

My next target was the game center near the bus station. As soon as I stepped inside, my ears were assaulted by numerous BGM.

"Wow… so noisy."

Heeheee…

I didn't have a game console, nor did I especially like games, but I didn't hate the noise. Although this place couldn't calm me down, I could vent my mood here.

You might not understand, but whenever I came here with my friends, I often spent time standing next to them and watching them play. Sometimes I even interrupted them to voice my comment.

Wasn't it a way to play without have to pay money? Because I didn't have much money in the first place.

"……"

Actually, it wasn't very good for a class rep like me to spend time in a game center.

Just because sometime I had come here before —

— Oh well, who cares. I only came to take a look

I strolled around the three floors. The fighting game area had a big overhead screen, showing an ongoing fight. I wasn't sure about the games name, but it looked familiar.

Fight, fight, fight, fight! The sounds of buttons smashing and fighting were loud and almost unbearable.

"Wow — amazing!"

As long as you are a man, you would look at this, even if you had no interested in the first place.

…A few years later, this area was replaced by a 'Siscalypse' fighting game, this game center became a meeting ground for siscon otaku, but that is another story.

"…Ah! I was too focused on that!"

I almost forgot the reason for me to be here.

When I was about to leave…

"Yaaaaaaaaaaa!!!!"

I heard a dying scream.

The sound was louder than any BGM, so everyone's attention was drawn there.

The one who just screamed was —

"Wow!?"

A cute girl. She wore a loose sleeveless T-shirt, a gorgeous red tie and plaid skirt. In short, she dressed like an idol. Her body was slim, aside from her breasts, which looked prominent.

Her face was twisting in anger, but she was cute, no doubt.



— In short, she was an eye-catching girl. From her looks, to her clothing, to the way she talked.

"I lost — How could I lose?!"

She even stood up and slammed the game machine.

"…What the heck? An idol snuck out from a concert hall?"

I muttered. Of course I was joking, but you have to have to admit it sounded solid.

…From the way she looked, she just lost a game and was now angry.

On the other hand, her opponent seemed like she couldn't stand it anymore, so she walked to this console.

"Hey — you are so noisy — can you stop harming this machine?"

She wore red glasses, and if I had to guess then she was in elementary school. But for some reason she wore a T-shirt with a muscular character from this game. Even for an elementary school girl, you shouldn't wear that.

The girl in red clothing looked back at the glasses girl.

"What, what, what…?"

"I said please stop harming this machine. Don't you feel sorry for it?"

She was right, but the way this brat said it made people angry.

Also, I thought that the red clothing girl would rebuke.

"Wa… Wa… Wah!!!!"

Hey, hey, don't cry! There's someone that will cry from losing a game…?

This is not your home, this is a game center. You look like you are older than I am.

Are you regretting it now?

I could only watch as things continued:

The idol girl's shoulders trembled; she wiped her tears and said:

"…Sorry."

She bowed and apologized. Even facing this way of speaking that angered people, she still admitted her own fault. The scene of an older girl apologizing to an elementary school girl is enough to stun people, but it didn't end there…

"Don't apologize to me. Apologize to this machine!"

I must say, this brat has a sharp tongue.

"Sor… Sorry."

"Good. I forgive you."

Everyone nearby, myself included, were staring at them in shock.

The idol girl continued in a gentle voice:

"…You are good!"

"Onee-chan sucks. Really really sucks!"

"Kuh… you brat…"

"Did you say something?"

"…No, nothing at all. That was the first time I played, so it can't be helped."

"That was my first time too!"

"Ah, really?"

"Yes, because that game was released today."

Wow, their relationship suddenly got better.

…So strange. I smiled wryly.

Becoming friends after one battle. I never thought that could happen in this very game center. That was one of the reasons why I liked this place despite not playing games.

"…By the way, do you have some tricks?"

"Yes."

"Teach me!"

Idol girl clapped her hands and made a praying posture.

The glasses elementary school girl proudly thrust out her well-developed chest.

"Hm hm. Listen well. I think that onee-chan lost because you don't love the human body enough."

"…Ah?"

"Muscles."

She said seriously and pointed at the big screen.

"Look! Look how beautiful they are! The sweating! The muscles of those men! The feeling when they touched each other! Don't you feel your heart racing?"

Her nose was gasping for air, she was extremely excited. This brat's mind was broken.

"…No, I don't feel anything in particular."

"Hm hm, no problem, no problem! Onee-chan, I will show you! Welcome… to the male's world…!"

The idol girl finally — reacted.

"Ah ah ah ah? Why wasn't your heart racing? Why?"

"Even if you ask… But… you are so disgusting."

"Disgusting…!? Did you just call me disgusting?"

She looked like she was dealt a heavy blow.

"Yes… don't tell me you like… that stuff…?"

"…What do you mean, that stuff?"

"…Like… man with man?"

"Oh wow."

The glasses girl looked interested.

"Have you ever heard about BL?"

"Nope, never." She shook her head. "But somehow, I like the sound of it."

"Then search for it via the internet!"

"Good!"

Although I didn't get it, this idiot idol girl seemed to have given the elementary school girl something amazing.

You told her to search a suspicious word, what would you do if that affected her future?

"So, I have to go back the men's world! Good luck onee-chan! See ya!"

She returned to her gaming machine.

…Did I just witness something I shouldn't have?

I kept standing there, but…

"…Hey, what are you looking at?"

The cute girl turned to me.

"Huh? Me?"

"Yes. Who else aside from you?"

I looked around and found out that, yes, I was totally alone.

"You asked what I am looking at. I was looking at a weird conversation between two weird girls."

"Oh…"

Later that day, I admitted that at that time, my words were too blunt.

"There, there is nothing to look at!"

She looked unhappy. Maybe because she felt embarrassed since I saw her crying.

"…About…"

I should speak to her…

"Could it be you want to do something to me?"

"I do not!"

Don't look at me with alert eyes.

But somehow, her eyes changed, she kept staring at me…

"Huh? You…"

"What?"

I took a step back…

"Aren't you Kousaka?"

"Ha?"

"Eh? Am I wrong? Are you — Kousaka Kyousuke?"

"How — do you know my name?"

I immediately questioned her. She was a weirdo I met by coincidence, but she knew me? Of course I was surprised! But she casually said:

"Of course I know you! You are famous!"

"Ah... really?"

Ah… so embarrassing. I never thought that my reputation had reached this far.

"Yes. You were a class rep during the second year. Your reputation of being a hot-blooded idiot is very well-known."

"Who is a hot-blooded idiot?"

"You of course."

"Kuh…"

I didn't notice myself…

So… that was how the other saw me during my second year…

But this meant she was from my school too. I was hoping that my reputation had reached other schools.

I dropped my shoulders…

"Ah!"

But I immediately revived and pointed at her:

"Wa! What are you doing? Suddenly pointing at my face!"

"Are you Sakurai?"

"Yes?"

"Are you Sakurai Akimi?"

"Ah — how did you know my name?"

She repeated the same line that I said seconds ago.

I kept my staring at her, finally managing to say:

"Because… you are also famous."

"Really?"

"Yes."

"Heehee… what did they say about me? The cutest girl in the school?"

"No way!"

I took another step back and pointed at her again:

"The one who skipped the entire first semester! That was you!"

"That's correct. I'm Sakurai Akimi. Please to meet you, Kousaka."

Just like a thief who was caught by a detective, she fearlessly announced her name.

"…I knew it…"

"Heeheee."

Just like my little sister, her teeth were exposed when she smiled.

"What a coincidence to meet you here."

I was planning to vent here, but instead I met you. My luck today is so great.

"Kousaka? Are you looking for me?"

"Yes. I brought a copy of my notebooks for you. But no one was home."

I quickly put my hand inside my bag.

"Ah — I see, thank you. Does that mean you are also a class rep this year?"

"You can say so."

"Hm — although you have brought it here, it's unnecessary."

My hand froze.

"Why?"

Because you aren't…… going to come back to school? But I was unable to say that.

"I could understand them even without a notebook ~♪"

…Yeah, you are the smartest girl at school…

So why didn't you come back to school? What a pity.

Sakurai scratched her head and laughed:

"Eheehee, sorry for wasting your time!"

"It's fine. That is a class rep's duty."

From the look of it, she was a simple girl. She screamed when losing a game. She cried in front of her opponent. She humbly asked for advice from someone smaller. She acted like a senior in front of me.

"…Just as they said, Kousaka-san is so kind."

"Yeah, I know too."

Kind — gentle — someone who loves to butt into other's affairs — I couldn't change how people saw me.

Recently, I even took pride when people saw me like that.

"Actually, I'm here to convince you to come back to school."

"Is that a class rep's duty too?"

"Partly. Of course I would help if my classmate was in trouble."

"Hm —"

She clearly wasn't interested.

"So, how about coming back to school, Sakurai?"

"Don't wanna."

As expected.

"Come back."

"Don't ~ wanna ~"

This is leading nowhere.

I changed the topic.

"Then can I ask something?"

"What is that?"

It was something that had been bugging me for a while…

"Why do you look like this?"

"Ah?"

Unexpectedly, her eyes widened.

I took a peek at her red clothing.

"My clothes… Are they cute?"

"Nope, it's very weird."

"You! What are you saying?!"

She looked so cute even now. But she still tried to act tough.

"— These are adult clothes… Aren't they cute?"

"I told you that they look very weird."

Can't you understand me?

"By the way, stop swaying your breasts."

I had no choice but to avert my eyes. She laughed 'hehee'.

"Oh — What are you looking at?"

"Noisy! I'm in a bad mood!"

I felt my face getting hotter.

"Say, why are you dressing like that?"

"Because I wanted to look like an adult?"

"You look completely different."

"Er? Really? I think that I look like a university student."

"Where would you find such weird university student?"

I scolded her.

"It can't be — a few days earlier, I saw a girl dressed like this on TV. She was famous among the students — so I dressed like her."

"She might be an idol, a model, but you are the only one dressed like this outside."

"Ah —?"

"If you want to look like an adult, how about wear casual clothes and apply make-up?"

Actually, I'm not very good with girl's clothing. But hearing me say that, she seemed to be deep in thought.

"Hey Kousaka, what are casual clothes like?"

That is a basic question…! But as if I know! I'm not a girl!

"Think about it yourself."

"I'm wearing what I thought of myself."

"In other words, your fashion sense doesn't exist."

"It's not like that! Your eyes might be wrong!"

Her expression suddenly changed.

"You… Aren't you going to admit that you have bad fashion sense…?"

"…Hm hmph… you are so rude to me… You said my cute dress is weird… how could I trust you."

"Oh? If you doubt me, then I have an idea. How about we ask someone else?"

"Someone else?"

I called to the game machine from before.

"Hey, elementary school girl! What do you think about the clothes of the onee-chan who just fought you?"

The replied came almost immediately:

"I think that her mind is screwed up."

"See? Even an elementary school girl said so!"

"By the way, I'm in middle school."

Ah, whatever.

"See? Even a middle school girl said so!"

"……"

Sakurai gritted her teeth and stared at me.

"Just you wait! The next time we meet, I will have you look at me with different eyes."

Then she ran away.

"Hey wait, wait!"

I shouted to her back:

"Sakurai! You have to come to school tomorrow!"

She stopped, turned away —

"Pfffff —"

She stuck out her tongue at me.

"Alright — you have to come."

Even the teacher was unable to bring her to school, so I didn't expect my job would be that easy.

Fine — it will be more interesting that way.

The next day, after school, I visited Sakurai's home. As expected, no one answered.

…Could she be here again?

I rode to the game center once again.

"Are you here Sakurai…?"

I strolled around but I didn't find anyone who looked like an escaped idol.

…She isn't here. We didn't exactly say that we would meet here today, but I felt that she would be here.

"…Ha…"

I stopped in front of the fighting game machine. In front of me was the same game that she played yesterday.

Normally, I wasn't interested in games, but this time —

"I will give it a try."

I threw in a ¥100 coin and started the game.

—By the way, my pocket money was very limited.

Half of the reason I did that was because of a whim, but the other half, I intended to use that as a topic the next time I met Sakurai. In fact, this was my first time touching an arcade game. But thankfully the computer wasn't hard; I beat three opponents with ease.

"It's pretty good…"

I felt good. As if I myself was fighting.

'A good game should make sure that a beginner could feel this way while playing!'

That was what 'I said during my third middle school year' to my junior. So this game is not bad.

During my fourth game, this time I was beaten.

"Ah…"

I wasn't its opponent.

"I lost —"

Right then, someone pat my shoulder.

"We meet again, Kousaka ♪"

I heard a familiar voice —

"Ah, Saku — wahhhhhhhhhhh!!!!!!!!"

I screamed and fall on the ground.

There was something scary in front of me.

A ragged purple jacket and a monster-like cosplay.

"Hey, what is with you?"

Sakurai's voice sounded confused.

"Sa... Sa… Sakurai?"

"Who else do you think I am?"

"I thought that you are some kind of villain from TV."

"What do you mean by that?!"

Sakurai questioned me. I was trembling in fear and still had no idea what was going on.

"Sorry… I… was wrong."

"Really? By the way, I'm cosplaying 'the forest girl' from a fairy tale."

"You look like a forest monster to me!"

Just what exactly did you imagine 'forest'?

"Ah?"

"You look beyond horrible! Hurry up and go clean off this make-up right away!"

"Alright… I was trying to put on make-up all by myself…"

I didn't have enough strength to tell her that her make-up couldn't be called make-up at all.

When Sakurai came back, we walked to the ground floor. There was a vending machine, tables and chairs there. We took a four seated table and started talking.

"You look normal now. But, hey, did you wear that make-up when you walked inside? Everyone must be terrified."

"No way, they must have been charmed by my beauty."

I highly doubted that.

"Well, it's good to meet you again."

"Oh? So Kousaka really came to see me. So why are you here?"

"Just like yesterday, because no one was at home, so I thought that maybe you would be here… Really… you didn't come to school today... Didn't I ask you to come?"

"I never agreed to do that ~"

She stuck her tongue out.

"Why don't you go to school?"

"…You like a direct method, don't you?"

Sakurai glanced at me.

"I don't like beating around the bush, so tell me why?"

"Uhm…"

"Look at me; be more direct."

I bluntly rebuked her. Sakurai pursed her mouth.

"Because school is boring."

"……"

It was too blunt. I was scared…

"But even this… You… you can't just stop coming."

"Why?"

"Why? Because… you have to study and… so…"

I could only answer with that.

Sakurai looked at me like I was an idiot and sneered.

"Hm… hmph hmph… Kousaka-san? Do you know my marks last year?"

"…I heard that you had the top in the school."

"Heehee."

Sakurai got carried away.

"It's the same. Teachers. Classmates. Everyone is the same. They only know to repeat over and over again that I have to study and study!"

…What is she getting at?

I got a bad feeling.

"So I studied as hard as I could! So I could thrust my chest high and say I don't want to go to school!"

"…You became the top of our school because you don't want to go to school?"

"Yes! Hm hm, so there is no need to say anything else, is there?"

"Are you an idiot?"

That was all I could think of back then.

"Since when do you not have to go to school because you are smart? Because you have good marks? "

"Ah? Can't I?"

"No. You can't."

"How… how could it be… then my effort… was it wasted?"

That was my first time seeing such an idiot. I told her:

"Sakurai, come to school with me tomorrow."

"Don't wanna!"

Sakurai made a >.< expression and refused.

"Hey."

"I don't want to go to school! Absolutely not!"

Sakurai clenched her fist and said seriously.

She was very determined…

"…You… You are an unimaginably powerful opponent…"

But at least I understood one thing: she clearly stated that 'I don't want to go to school' not because 'I don't want to study."

I tried to persuade her using common sense:

"If you keep skipping school, your grades will fall. How can you enter high school at this rate?"

"Didn't I just tell you that I don't want to go to school?"

So you don't want to go to high school as well.

"So what do you plan to do later?"

"Live my life happily with my parent's money."

"Are you some kind of nerd?"

"What is wrong with being a nerd? You are so annoying!"

"Don't get angry at me because of your embarrassment!"

"I will not go to school!"

"Look at yourself. Do you know what you just said?"

Both of us were breathing heavily and staring at each other.

"…Then I will fight to the end. If you don't promise that you will go to school, I will stick with you for the rest of the day."

"Are you kidding me?! You are even more annoying than a kid, Kousaka!"

"So what?! It's a good chance, let's play!"

"…Ack… you seem serious…"

"Did I tell you already?"

Sakurai smiled in embarrassment.

"Ha… ha… Kousaka-kun? I'm going to do something that a class rep shouldn't. Are you really going to stick with me?"

What a brat. Sakurai thrust her finger at my face:

"By the way, my plan is to play here until this place closes!"

"Don't worry; I will stick with you until the end!"

"Until mid-night? You must be aware that this is a delinquent's behavior ~"

"Piece of cake!"

The worst thing that would happen if I missed the curfew is Dad would beat me up again and forbid me from eating dinner.

Hearing me say that, Sakurai made an 'oh crap, it is outside of my expectation' expression and continued:

"Also, I planned to go to a karaoke bar until the next morning."

"I see. Good. We can sing until tomorrow."

"How can you laugh it off —?"

"— In short, I will stick with you wherever you go!"

So what will you do? I asked with my eyes.

"Kuh… Oh… Ahhhh!!!"

Can't take it anymore huh?

"Alright Kousaka! You are so annoying! I get it already! I will go to school!"

"So do you want to go to school now?"

"…Damn… I lose! I lose! Are you happy now?!"

"Hahaha! Good! Then see you at school tomorrow!"

"Okay, see you at school tomorrow!"

The next day —

"Sakurai you bastard! You didn't come to schooooooool!"

I slammed the table.

"You dare to trick me!? How dare you skip school again!"

After school, I rushed to the game center immediately.

Sakurai was waiting for her turn to play a dancing game. She was wearing her idol like clothes from before.

"…Ah, you have come."

She casually said without a hint of shame.

"Ah, sorry, sorry. I didn't want to trick you. I truly wanted to go to school today."

"So why don't you come?"

"Because — I suddenly came down with a sickness?"

"I can see through your lie in 0.1 seconds."

"I'm not lying — my body is that weak."

She placed one hand on her chest and said:

"You forced me to go to school, so it caused a lot of stress on my body."

"Yeah, yeah, everyone who skips school also says that — say, how could you have fun every day? You can't make friends without going to school."

I even prepared a 'there is a lot of fun at school' and 'I will help you with anything at school' speech to persuade her.

But Sakurai didn't even give me a chance to open my mouth.

"You are too naïve, Kousaka ~ 'you can't make friend unless you go to school' — your way of thinking is too narrow."

"What…? How could you make friends without going to school then?"

"2chan."

"Are you a hikikomori?"

I thought you had a good idea or something…!

"And — from this game center too."

"…Ah."

I could understand that. The first time we met, she was happily talking with a brat.

This girl isn't someone who can live without friends…

Seemed like I misunderstood her…

"Sorry. You are right, it's not like you can only make friends at school."

"……"

I bluntly apologized. Sakurai's eyes widened in shock.

"What?"

"…Uhm… I… I never thought that you would suddenly understand."

"Huh?"

Before I could ask what she meant, Sakurai looked away from me.

"Huh? Then it's my turn to —"

…She ran away.

Before I could finish, Sakurai laughed it off and went back to her dancing game.

She danced in what sounded like a rhythm, which didn't sound too bad.

But when I looked at the score ….

"…You are so useless……"

"Wh… What are you saying?!"

From the beginning, Sakurai hadn't followed the game's rhythm. The evidence was the numerous 'Fail' shown on the screen.

She was so focused on it that she didn't realize she lost her underwear while playing

Seeing Sakurai dance with her disheveled clothes, I couldn't help but laugh.

"Hey! Did you just laugh at me!?"

"Oh? Didn't you purposely choose to dance like this to humor everyone around?"

"I — I'm not! Oh… Kousaka you are a villain! I have no more respect for you!"

"Don't look around. Focus on your screen. You are about to lose."

I pointed at the screen. Sakurai turned her attention back and said:

"Ha! Take a look yourself!"

She shouted and increased her pace. She was angry, but she actually scored more points that way.

"Hm, not bad."

I praised her.

Sakurai waved her hands and laughed:

"Ahahaha — this is my real power!"

…She seemed excited.

"Why don't you spend your real power on something else?"

"I don't need to! Good, good! I'm going to beat it!"

So she has a side like this too. I noticed yesterday that Sakurai really liked games.

She kept dancing in her awkward style. Seeing that, others just laughed it off. Thankfully, their laughter didn't have any evil intent, just 'Hey look, there is a weird girl over there.'

"Ah…"

Just like everyone around, I smiled.

"Ya ya ya ya! Dohya!"

During this time, Sakurai's dance reached the climax —

Just when I worried if she would fall, she really did fall.

"Wa! Oh, wah wah!"

She fell forward.

"Hey!"

Her face hit the ground.

The game's screen showed the words 'Game Over.' Around me, people were clapping. She obviously failed, but she received applause never-the-less. What an unbelievable scene.

"Ah… Ah… Sakurai, are you okay?"

"…My face."

"Your face?"

"My face is a mess! It hurts ——!"

"Sure it will."

Sakurai stood up and wiped her tears. She said:

"Ah ~ this is bad ~ I broke a bone. I can't go to school like this."

"You sounded like you are having fun… Wah!"

"Is something wrong? Is there a bruise on my face?"

"No… not your face."

It's your breast.

"What? What is wrong? Where is it?"

I looked at Sakurai's well developed breasts.

"You — dropped your breast."

Sakurai instantly turned into a statue.

"……"

She slowly looked at her breasts.

Something that 'should exist' was not there anymore.

A long long longggg silence……

And that 'something' is now lying on the floor…

"Ahhhhhhhhhh. My pad —!"

Her voice was so loud. I'm sure we were attracting attention now.

I used my body to cover Sakurai, temporarily shielding her from view.

"I didn't know that girls's breasts could fall off."

"Of course they can't!"

"But it's lying down there…"

"…Oh… that… that's…"

With teary eyes, Sakurai struggled to answer.

"What? What is that?"

"…A girl's se… secret…"

Blushing madly, she answered.

"……"

I didn't know what to say, so I picked up that 'girl's secret' and returned it to her.

"Here."

"Tha…Thank you."

Sakurai was so embarrassed that she was trembling, she placed the 'girl's secret' back to its 'original position'.

…So that is how you wear it…

That was what I thinking. I swore to myself that in the future, I would never allow myself to be fooled by fake breasts…

Since then, I trained to identify real and fake breasts. In the future, if my girlfriend wore fake breasts during our date, I would recognize them immediately.

"Hey… Kousaka… Say…"

"Yes?"

"Can you… keep this a secret?"

"You mean the fact that you used fake breasts?"

"Don't say it!"

"You aren't in a position to speak to me like that."

"Oh… I'm very sorry."

That is my chance.

My mouth twisted into an evil smile.

"Hm, that depends on your attitude."

"Ah! Could it be that you want to see my underwear in exchange…?!"

"What are you saying?!"

Move your hand away from your skirt right now! Damn… just what do you think of me?

She is so hard to deal with!

But Sakurai bit her lips and asked:

"So — what do you want?"

"Come to school tomorrow."

"…Kou… Kousaka-sama… that is a very difficult request."

Don't put on that 'I'm-gonna-cry' expression. You made me look like I just gave you some horrible order.

"I don't need you to come to school every day. Just coming tomorrow is fine."

"Only one day?

"Yes. Only one day and I will bring the secret that you used fake breasts with me to my grave."

"Ohhhhhh…"

Sakurai broke into cold sweat and seemed to be deep in thought.

Are you that worried because you have to go to school?

"…I… understand… Just one day… okay?"

"Yes."

"But… I haven't gone to school for a long time… can you protect me there?"

"Leave it to me."

"……"

Seeing that Sakurai had a trouble expression, I confidently said:

"I will show you that school is a very interesting place."

"You are more stubborn that the rumor said. Do you feel that happy when hanging out with me?"

"Yes — not only that, you are my classmate..."

I paused for a second before continuing:

" — but you are also my friend."

"…Friend."

"Yes. I'm looking forward seeing you tomorrow."

"Alright… see you tomorrow at school."

We bade goodbye to each other. I was smiling happily, while she had a forced smile.

The next day at school.

"Sakurai you bastard! You didn't come to schooooooool!"

Just like 24 hours ago, this scene repeated itself.

You brat! I won't forgive you! I trusted you! Twice!

"What is wrong? You acted the same way yesterday too."

Manami asked me. I tilted my head in response.

"Manami, did you know? That Sakurai's breasts are fake?"

"Kyou-chan! How could you reveal Sakurai-san's secret like this!?"

"I just fulfilled my part of the promise. Anyway, Manami, there is something I need to ask you."

"Uhm. What is that?"

The next day, in my room.

"Kyou-chan… Hey, Kyou-chan…"

"Uh… Um…"

Someone was shaking me...

"Kyou-chan… wake up ~"

"…Uhmmmmm."

"If you don't wake up, I will poke you."

"…Five more… minutes…"

"You just said that ~"

"……"

"Really… You want me to make fun of you?"

"……"

"I'm going to do it for real! Have you prepared yourself?"

"……"

"NOOOOOOOOO!"

"Ki… Kirino-chan?"

"No, no, no! I will wake onii-chan up, go away Tamura-chan!"

"Oh, but……"

"Enough! I can wake him up!"

…Ah… why… suddenly it sounded so noisy —

"Ouch!"

*Thud*

"Cough cough!"

Something hit my stomach. I slowly opened my eyes.

"What… the…?!"

I took a good look at my assaulter.



Sitting on my stomach was — my little sister.

"Kirino… I told you to stop waking me up like that!"

"But — you wouldn't wake up unless I did that."

"No way. I can wake up on my own."

"You are lying, right, Tamura-chan."

Kirino spoke to the side. I followed her eyes and saw Manami in her uniform.

"Ah, good morning, Kyou-chan."

"Good morning."

"What is with all this noise in the morning?"

"Just like usual, Tamura-chan was having trouble waking you up, onii-chan!"

Why do you sound so proud of yourself? Hurry and get up.

"Kyou-chan, does Kirino-chan wake you up every day?"

"Sometimes, not every day. Kirino, get up. You are so heavy."

"Mwu… I'm not heavy."

"I don't mean that you are fat! But you are still heavy when you sit on my stomach."

Recently, this little sister of mine started to act more like a girl.

"Hurry and get up…"

"Muuuuuuuu……"

I gently shoved my little sister away and stood up. Then I stretched my body.

"Ha……"

"Good! I'm up!"

"Heehe… Good morning."

Manami smiled gently. I turned to her and asked:

"Say, Manami, why are you here so early?"

"Kyou-chan! You asked me to come ~"

"Really? Ah, yeah. I asked you that yesterday."

Kirino tilted her head and listened to my conversation with Manami.

"What is going on?"

"There is someone in my class who refuses to go to school. I planned to go get her."

"Wow, that sounds hard."

"Really? I think it's worth doing."

I grinned. Seeing that, for some reason Kirino looked away.

"…Forget it, at least it doesn't sound too bad… You should give it a try."

As usual, I replied:

"Hmph hmph… Just leave it to me."

I gently put my hand on my little sister's head and stroked her hair.

Although recently, my little sister entered her rebellious age and always tried to go against me and Manami.

"Heehee."

As soon as I smiled with her, she would smile back.

On our way from Kousaka's house, Manami said.

"I see. So you want me to go get Sakurai-san with you."

"That's right. Unless we want to be late for school, we have to leave early. I called you to ensure that everything goes according to the plan. "

I can wake up early, but it will not be as easy as before.

"Beside, a lone boy coming to get a girl, her parents will surely feel suspicious."

"Wow… Kyou-chan is really thoughtful."

"Hey! Why do you sound so distant?"

"Really?"

There was no smile in Manami's eyes.

"Hey! Manami… are you angry?"

"A bit."

"…Because I forgot about you earlier?"

"No."

So why?

"Why are you angry then?"

"I'm so jealous of Sakurai-san."

Holding her bag, Manami bulged her cheeks out and said:

"Kyou-chan… recently, you are all Sakurai-san this and Sakurai-san that."

"That was because…"

Years later, when I think back, I finally understood.

Although I felt that Manami wouldn't change no matter what, but her real characteristic —

I had a feeling… that 'the current Manami' and 'Manami from that time' were different.

"That's so nice. I want Kyou-chan to care about me as much as her ~"

"Ha, what are you saying?"

"Because ~?"

"No because, idiot."

I lightly knocked on my childhood friend's head.

"That hurt."

"Listen, Manami… I will only say this once, so listen carefully."

Looking away, I coughed and said:

"You are my life-time friend, just like family. If something happened to you, I will absolutely rush to help you."

"…Really?"

"Yes. I will face a million deaths without hesitation.[1]"

I felt half embarrassed and half proud. But those were my true feelings, so I could say it with a smile.

"I see."

Manami smiled.

What an idiot. I just said something natural — Why are you so happy?

"Say, Kyou-chan."

"Yes?"

Like a happy puppy waging its tail, Manami swung her bag around.

"It's the same for me."

Ah……

"I see."

A while later, we came to Sakurai's house.

"Wow, what a big house."

"So? Are you scared now?"

I rang the doorbell.

"Wow, did you just ring the doorbell?"

"Yes."

"You should let me mentally prepared myself."

"Who cares about you?"

Beside, who knows how long you will need.

Kousaka Kyousuke is a hot-blooded and impatient man.

But there is no reaction from Sakurai's house. It was the same when I arrived after school.

The time was around 7 o'clock, she should be at home. That was why I decided to attack 'right now'.

"No one answered."

"No one — ah, Ky… Ky… Kyou-chan! What are you doing?"

"This…"

*Ding dong ding dong ding dong*

"Is this what they call a combo strike?"

"What will you say to her family?"

"Apologize."

"Sound more serious about it! What if they scold you ~?"

Manami kept talking, but I had already ignored her.

If you went with me, you had to prepare for this stuff.

Ten seconds passed…

"I see…"

I looked at the big house.

In other words, no matter how many times I rang the doorbell, no one would come.

"…Could it be that she had gone out already?"

"That early in the morning? I doubt it."

"…Then… could it be that the bell is broken?"

"Didn't you hear it ring?"

If it was broken, then where did the 'ding dong' sound come from?

I considered for a moment — then I decided to keep going.

"Ky… Kyou-chan! You can't just go in on your own ~"

"I will only take a look around in the garden."

I opened the gate and entered.

If they get angry because of that, I will just apologize.

"Maybe she is sick and can't come out?"

Unless I see her, I won't believe that.

"Wait here, Manami."

"Ah? What?"

My childhood friend is a good girl, but she isn't very flexible. To go into other's house without invitation — this is 'a bad thing'. To tell the truth, I was excited.

Sakurai's house was a two floor building, which was surrounded by a square wall. The garden was large enough to play football.

"Ack — the first floor's door was closed, even the windows were covered."

I had no way to look inside. So I looked up to the second floor.

"Second floor — wow"

I saw something nice.

Wasn't that a pair of underwear?"

— The balcony's window was opened. So whoever was inside forgot to lock it after they went outside…

"They were so careless."

But this is my chance. I grinned and looked around.

"Good, that will do."

There was a tree branch that went straight to the balcony.

What do you think I will do? Of course…

"Hey, yo!"

I climbed the tree. During my elementary years, I was a brat too, so I was familiar with this. I climbed to the branch and made sure it was sturdy enough.

"Yo!"

I jumped and successfully landed on the balcony.

"Haha… I'm amazed at myself ~ I feel like I'm Lupin."

Easy to get full of myself — that was one of my specialties.

"Alright."

I could't ignore my dirty shoes and go inside, so I left them outside and entered through the window.

"Sorry for intruding."

I muttered. The light wasn't turned on, so it was hard to see.

"Parents… No, is this Sakurai's room?"

Due to my limited vision, I could only guess.

It is way bigger than my room… but my room is much cleaner.

Even though I'm a boy, I felt like I should clean it up a bit.

Previously worn clothes were thrown everywhere. The table was turned into a make-shift wardrobe. On her bed, there were game consoles, CD's and manga. The TV was showing a game show.

Just from my first look, I already understood one thing:

…Sakurai was spoiled by her parents.

Maybe she is the only child.

I looked left and right, and then —

"— Huh?"

Suddenly, I noticed something near my leg…

"…I thought that you weren't at home."

"Ha… um…"

Sakurai Akimi was sleeping in front of her game console. She looked like a frog which had just been run over by a car… She probably played a game until she fell asleep…

Her pink pajama's buttons were all opened, revealing her navel….

"……"

Don't make weird assumption about my silence. I have no hidden desire to watch Sakurai. I have no interested in girl who used fake breasts!

But, but… if her parents saw me now, there is no way I could defend myself.

I should go back… that was what I thought.

In a corner, I saw something strange.

"What is that?"

Some 500ml plastic bottles which were filled with a yellow liquid.

"……"

I carefully examined a bottle.

…I… I have heard that… a hikikomori who is addicted to gaming… will not move away from the TV even if they needed to go to the restroom… Inside those bottles… could it be…

"…Sa… Sakurai… you… Did you…?!"

You did THAT ?

I broke into cold sweat…

And then…

"…Um?"

Sakurai turned her body. This time, her chest was all exposed. I quickly turned away.

…I didn't see anything! I didn't see anything! I didn't see anything!

"..Um… Oh… Ah… My voice…"

Still sleepy, Sakurai made a not very lady like posture and took a bottle….

"Hey hey…"

What are you going to do? I tried to speak, but it was too late. She already opened the bottle and…

"Gulp gulp gulp… Ha!"

"What did you drink????"

"…Kousaka?"

"I'm done for."

Because of her shock, she forgot her current state. She blinked a few times then shouted:

"Kou… Kousaka!? Why — Why are you here?"

She is fully awake now.

"First thing first, cover your chest!"

"Ha? Ya!!!!!!"

Finally noticing her clothes, Sakurai threw the bottle away and quickly did up her buttons.

"…Did you see?"

"No, I didn't."

"It's good then… No, it's not good!"

So is it good or not?

Sakurai suddenly stared fiercely at me:

"Wha… What... What… What is going on! Answer me!"

"First, answer my question!"

I pointed at the bottle:

"What is inside that bottle?"

"Huh? Carbonated soda?"

"You mean urine?"

"I can't drink that! You scared me!"

"What a misunderstanding…!"

Phew…! Thank god! I knew that she was a strange girl, but thankfully she didn't drink her own urine.

"Why are they lying in a corner of the room?"

"Because after I received them, my maid said that she would throw the box away, so I had to take them out! I planned to take them to the refrigerator, but I forgot."

"…Ah, I see."

Unsettled, Sakurai grinned:

"So, Kousaka-san? Why are you in a girl's room?"

"Ah… that… er…."

"Ha! Could it be — that you were here to spend the night?"

"It is morning now!"

"Oh…"

Sakurai looked outside at the bright balcony.

"That means… you came in here before sunrise?"

"What will you do if I say 'yes'?"

"Oh! Wah… that!"

Sakurai was embarrassed.

"Re… really?"

"No."

"Don't joke with me!"

Sakurai yelled.

Kuh… she looked like a beast… I made a beast tamer posture.

"Calm down, okay?"

"How can I calm down in front of a stranger who broke into a girl's room?"

Yeah, that made sense.

"Let me explain. I didn't come here before sunrise, nor did I plan to harm you."

"You said 'harm?'"

"Don't yell! What if your parents come!?"

"My mom is away because of work! And don't scold me!"

"…So your mom is away… That's good…"

"You had a suspicious expression just now."

She is sharp. Too sharp.

"However… this situation… We are alone…

"Alright — Sakurai."

"What do you want to do?"

After all this chaos, I finally got to the main topic:

"Good morning. I came to get you — let's go to school."

# Chapter 3


第三章
ore no
imouto ga
konnani
kawaii
wake ga
nai⓫

" — And how does any of this relate to now? It is just an old story — how is that related to our talk?"

Actually, I had no idea, why did I have to retell that story?

Kirino, Manami, and I are having a talk on the second floor of the Tamura household.

"I want to hear until the end."

"Why? It's meaningless to keep talking about my miserable past."

Kirino's mouth turned into a へ shape, she looked unhappy.

"Wrong. Because I have found out many things, so I'm interested… Just tell me the end. Didn't you hear my shameful past earlier? You have to tell me your shameful past too!"

"You are so unreasonable!"

I'm not actually interested in Kirino's past… It would be more accurate to say that it gave me a lot to think about.

Ah damn it! I don't care anymore. Yes, I was thinking about Kirino's story just now.

"Sorry, Kyou-chan… But what happened 'three years ago' is very important for us. The reason that Kirino-chan hates me so much… and the reason Kirino-chan hates Kyou-chan… will become clear."

…Just now, Manami's 'us' probably didn't mean just 'Kirino and Manami.'

She meant all three of us.

"— I never thought of it like that."

"But it's interesting."

Kirino grinned. For some reason she was blushing while looking at me fearlessly.

"Alright, if you like, I will tell you another of my shameful stories."

"…Another of your shameful stories?"

"Yes. Although you always said 'the past me three years ago' was miserable —"

"But at that time you were 'my favorite onii-chan.' I thought that my onii-chan who always tried his best… was so cool."

September, three years ago, I went to Sakurai's house to pick her up with Manami.

This is what happened after that ——

"So cool! So beautiful! It doesn't look like my own room anymore!"

Sakurai's household, second floor. Sakurai's messy room had changed so much just after a few minutes of cleaning.

Manami opened the windows.

"Ah, Sakurai-san, you can't! You have to button your clothes ~"

"Alright ~"

Just like a kid who was taking orders from her mother, Sakurai replied.

Good. She buttoned her chest area!

"Say, your pajamas look quite normal."

Because of her usual strange clothes, I thought that she would have some more weird clothing.

"Ah, pervert! Where did you look since the beginning?"

Sakurai covered her chest.

"…You are too self-conscious."

"…Kyou-chan, what did she mean by 'since the beginning?'"

"It's nothing! Nothing at all! Don't make weird assumptions!"

At last, we finally succeeded moving Sakurai out of her bed.

"Let's go to school. Still, your room is such a mess."

"Mwu… I'm so sorry — Oh right, right. I have to clean up my room now, so Kousaka should go to school first!"

Sakurai started talking nonsense.

If I was alone, then true, it would be a problem.

I knew that cleaning the room was just an excuse. But I had Manami-sama on my team. I pushed Manami forward and introduced them.

"Please to meet you ~ Sakurai-san. I'm your classmate, Tamura Manami."

"Please to meet you."

After they finished their introductions, I said:

"Hey Manami. Sakurai said she has to clean this room so before she can go to school."

"In that case, let me help too!"

My childhood friend who rarely butts into other's affairs had activated her mother mode.

"No! Please allow me to help!"

She was so excited.

"Ah… then… please."

Sakurai was overwhelmed, showing an 'I miscalculated!' expression. You deserved it!

"Um, leave it to me ~ Ah, Kyou-chan, please go outside."

"Why?"

"Do you want to see… a girl changing?"

Ah, I see.

"Then I will wait outside."

A few minutes later —

I received the signal from Manami and returned.

The room was sparkling, even the air felt fresher.

The garbage was placed in a corner, everything was perfect.

As expected of Manami!

"Tamura-chan is so amazing! Do you want to work here as a maid?"

"Ahaha, it's nothing ~"

Although Manami was acting modest, I could understand what Sakurai felt. I also agreed that Manami would make an excellent mother. I only left for a few minutes, but this room had completely changed. But Sakurai was still in her pajamas.

"I see that you have finished cleaning. But Sakurai is still in her previous clothes."

"Because ~ Sakurai-san refused to change."

"Ah ha ~☆ "

Are you a kid?

"It can't be. Sakurai, are you going to go to school in your pajamas?"

"Ah, what are you talking about? My room is so nice, I want to go back to sleep."

"Hey, wait; that's not what you said earlier!"

"I changed my mind! Good night ~"

She jumped on her bed and immediately crawled under her blanket.

Really… I merciless pulled her blanket.

"Get up! Listen to other people! I told you that I'm here to pick you up!"

"Don't ~ wanna ~! I ~ want ~ to ~ sleep!" She held firmly onto her blanket and resisted. "Kou… Kousaka should listen to other people too! I told you before that I don't want to go to school!"

"But we promised to go to school!"

"Yes, 'go to school tomorrow.' Is it tomorrow?"

Agrghhh!!!! She is so good with sophistry!!!

"I came here because you didn't keep your promise!"

Ugh ahhhhh! I pulled the blanket off. That caused Sakurai, who was holding on it to fall on the floor — *thud*!

"That hurt… my ass…"

Still sitting on the floor, Sakurai said:

"…You are so annoying, Kousaka."

But she was looking at Manami instead of me. She seemed to ask 'does he always act that way?'

Manami firmly nodded.

"Because butting into other's affair is Kyou-chan's specialty, just like a predator specializes in hunting."

"Don't compare me to something so disgusting!"

"Hm… I see… it's easy to understand."

That was what Sakurai said. What a rude girl.

"Anyway, today I had prepared to skip school before coming here. So you should be aware that I have made up my mind."

"Since the beginning, I think that although Kousaka said you were worried about me you actually only wanted to do whatever you like."

"That's right. So what?"

I returned the question. I've already accepted that all those talks about my habit of 'butting into other's affairs, causing trouble for others' are all nonsense.

So, I always thought 'I did that because I wanted to.'

I also think it is cooler this way.

"Wow, you have such disgusting expression on your face."

"Why did you suddenly badmouth me?"

"What are you thinking?"

First, apologize to me… I muttered, but proudly replied:

"Of course, I'm thinking about how I could make you go to school."

"Ahaha? So, what can you think of? Can you think of even one?"

Sakurai mocked me:

"True, I did make a promise to 'go to school tomorrow' with you. But you will just find another reason tomorrow to skip it."

"I'm not like that. But that's how girls are."

"So I came here to pick you up directly. No matter what kind of situation occurs, I will not allow you to skip school today."

"Ho… But you are too late. I don't want to go to school today."

This is not something you should say so proudly!

"I can see that already — at least give me a reason."

Should I ask her 'why don't you want to go to school today?' But she would reply with 'because I want to sleep in.' I need to ask her 'why did you stay up late last night?'

"Ahaha — so you finally ask this."

Sakurai slowly stood up and smiled mischievously.

"The reason I stayed up late — is because —"

"Because you played this game?"

Her words interrupted, Sakurai fell backward.

"— Yeah, that's right… but my rhythm is disturbed."

I understand what you are feeling. Because Manami only knew how to speak in her own rhythm, so when you speak with her, your rhythm will be disturbed… Of course, since I had spent so much time with her, it would be more accurate to say that I'm used to her slow rhythm.

I looked back at the game console and the TV.

Just like Manami said — Sakurai probably played this game until morning and fell asleep because of her exhaustion.

"Is this game that interesting?"

"Not exactly."

Hmmm?

"I got bored after five minutes, so I slept after that."

Hm… I see. Yeah, I didn't see her play that fighting game again. She only tried out the newest game that she hadn't tried before.

What a time-killer expert…

"So that's not the reason you stayed up late?"

"Yes. Before that, I played another game."

Sakurai walked to the computer and turned it on.

The screen immediately brightened.

"Wow, so amazing. Is that the legendary 'desktop'…?"

Manami was amazed at the modern technology. Well, this is understandable in her case.

Because although Tamura's household also opened a shop, but…

— For some reason when I heard the words 'internet' and 'SNS' from Manami, I felt something strange. Now I understood.

"Hmhm ~ how is that! This is the newest model."

Sakurai probably misunderstood that Manami was amazed at the new computer, she quickly opened the browser. (Is that a browser?)

"Is that your internet home page and stuff?"

Because I'm not sure myself, I pretended that I already knew.

"Yes. I'm now playing Imouto-City."

"Imouto-City?"

Like a parrot, Manami repeated the word in a strange way.

"Yes, Imouto-City. Short for Imouto-City Game."

"????"

A big question mark popped out of Manami's head.

"Eh? You don't know? That…"

Sakurai thought for a while, then…

"I can't think of any explanation. Kousaka, please?"

"I have no idea what Imouto-City is about."

"For real? Are you an idiot! Imouto-City is a web game!"

"Okay."

Good, it's easy to understand.

"There is a huge little sister fetish in society now. Imouto-City took that chance and became very popular in the SNS."

"I see."

Nope, I didn't understand it at all.

"Wow, so Sakurai-san is a computer expert ~"

Manami, I'm sure that you also didn't understand anything. So please don't say anything unnecessary.

"…Ta… Tamura-chan? Did you look down on me in secret?"

See? The computer expert's face is twisting now.

"I'm not."

You aren't lying, but such words are useless against someone who thinks that you looked down on them.

I tried to change the topic:

"So, Imouto-City is…?"

"One of the reasons I don't want to go to school! I became addicted to this game. Even though it's a simple game, it made people forget about time ~"

"By the way, how many reasons do you have in total?"

"Ha, I lost count after 100."

"That's two digits more than I expected!"

But she didn't sound like she was lying. Then what could I do? Solving them one by one would be too time consuming.

"……"

"Uh? Kousaka, why don't you say something? Did you give up already?"

"Yeah, I give up."

"Ah…"

Truth to be told, Sakurai's 'more than 100 reasons not to go to school' wasn't complete nonsense.

Even I had to admit that studying is boring. We are forced to study knowledge that we may or may not use in the future, and we lose half a day in class.

Sometimes a teacher yelled at us for no reason, sometimes we met with classmates that we don't like, sometimes there are bullies.

Just like adults' society. School is not a good place. And we don't receive pay for going there. It's unbearable. However, people still go to school.

Why? Because their parents said so? Because it's a habit? Or they just do it because others are doing the same thing?

Is going to a good company in the future worth the time we spent on going to school? Everyone might have different answers for this question, but for me… I'm not going to school because of my habit, that's for sure. Actually, I have never thought about the question 'why do I have to go to school?'

But now that I think about it — I realize that there is nothing good about school.

'I could have fun for the rest of my life even without going to school' — Sakurai's words rang in my head.

I can't lie to myself anymore. Her words were right.

So —

"I give up on trying to 'remove the reasons that make you don't want to go to school.'"

I smiled:

"Instead, I will make a reason for you 'to go to school!'"

That's right.

That's the only way.

I go to school every day without a reason, although partly because of habit, but also because it's fun. Not to mention that my father will scold me if I skip school.

There are a lot of unpleasant things at school, but I could chat about silly things with my friends, I could help solve problems. At least, for me, school is a paradise.

Haha… how about it? Was I cool?

I secretly took a peek at Sakurai.

"…Ha ~"

She didn't even listen to me! Ah forget it! I reboot my enthusiasm and said:

"So, 'the battle to return to school,' 1st round now begins! Manami, show her 'that!'"

"? What is 'that?'"

……Tch……

"That is that! What I told you during lunch break yesterday —"

"Ah, that! ~ Um, here ~"

…Whenever she was around, I felt all my tension slowly disappear…

With sleepy eyes, Sakurai asked:

"Hwu… ah… Kousaka, what is that?"

"Hmph… this is my secret weapon."

"Secret — weapon?"

Sakurai slightly narrowed her eyes.

Good. Just you wait.

While keeping my eyes on Sakurai, I offered a hand to Manami and signaled her to give me 'that'.

"Here, Kyou-chan"

"Um."

I grinned —

"Take this Sakurai! This is our present for you!"

I gave her 'that.'

"What is that? A paper?"

"A greeting card with everyone in our class's signature. Everyone encouraged you to come to school again — how is that? Are you moved?"

"Are you purposely trying to provoke me!?"

Sakurai roared in anger.

*Whack*

She used the greeting card to slap me!

"What are you doing?"

"That's my line! Are you an idiot! Is that something you could show to someone who doesn't want to go to school?"

Sakurai continued, furious:

"If you don't give me a good explanation, I will not get up anymore!"

"Why?"

"Kuh kuh… You really don't understand… do you? Each of these greetings are like a curse for me! It made want to go to school even less!"

"I see. That's how it is, right?"

"Yes!"

She crawled to a corner of the bed, hugged herself and muttered:

"It's just like using Holy Water on an Undead race… ah… Why can't you understand Kousaka!? I'm weak against it!"

As if I know!

"So 'the battle to return to school' 1st round is a failure."

"You mean you have a second round?"

Oh, I have a lot in my bag ~

"Of course I did — in my opinion, almost all the fun of school is related to 'friends.' Club activities, break time, after school — you could spend time with your friends during that time."

"Ok, maybe."

Good. Good.

"Playing at home without going to school; while it isn't a bad idea, making friends at school is fun too. So, the second round of 'the battle to return to school' is inviting you to a club!"

When I think back about that day, I realized that my options to solve that problem were quite limited.

That was what I said to Kuroneko too.

"Club activities?"

Sakurai didn't seem to be interested.

"To tell the truth, don't you think it's too late? It's already third year, second semester."

"If you have a club you like, it's not a problem."

I pointed at Manami and proudly said:

"My childhood friend Manami is the club president of the home economy club. Thanks to her, home economy is my favorite club, where I can relax."

"Um um… relax…"

She seemed interested

'Relax' seemed like a keyword to deal with a lazy person like this girl.

"Heehee… My home opened a small shop, so I'm used to making meals for everyone ~ also, among those second years there are some beginners too, so we could teach you together."

This time, she didn't look remotely interested.

"How was it Sakurai? Why don't you give it a try? You could make friends, you could enjoy free food, and by the way, they could help fix your strange clothes too."

"That last sentence is unnecessary! My clothes don't need to be fixed!"

"Oh right, right (bland voice) — so, do you want to join?"

"Don't wanna!"

"Why? Isn't that interesting? You could go to the game center after school. If you are worried then I will join that club too."

"…You… are… so… annoying."

Sakurai sighed. It looked like my second round failed too.

"Hey, Kousaka."

"Yes?"

"If I let you touch my breast, will you go back?"

"You don't want to go to school that much!?"

"Yes."

Sakurai seemed embarrassed.

"How… about this?"

"Um…"

What should I do…

"Ky… Kyou-chan! Why are you hesitating?"

"…I'm not?"

It's because you are right next to me, Manami.

I tried to make myself as convincing as possible and answered Sakurai's proposal.

"…Um, Sakurai, do you think that I will take the bait so easily?"

"You seem to have already taken the bait to me."

"I have not!"

That's right. Even if I touch them, I wouldn't feel anything!

"……"

Sakurai was thinking hard —

She probably was trying to figure out how to make me give up. In that case, sorry Sakurai, there is no 'give up' in my dictionary.

After a while, Sakurai spoke again.

"Hey… just now, that greeting card… did you force everyone to make it?"

What is that idiot talking about?

"It's not nice to make it like that. I did make the proposal, but everyone took part in it by their own will. Hm hmph, that's because of my reputation at school."

"Ah, then another question. Do you two… know about the school's website?"

"Nope."

"No."

Both Manami and I replied. I thought about that for a second…

"Is that an H website?"

"Of course not! Kousaka is a pervert!"

Sakurai yelled at me.

"To put it simply, this is a website created by students. Most of it is a forum for cell phones — do you understand now?"

"Yes?"

"Somewhat."

So our school used '2chan' for that too.

Sakurai nodded.

"You are anonymous there, so you can badmouth the teachers, make rumors… in there without worry."

"Alright, so what? Why are you talking about that now?"

"Kousaka's actions were posted on that website."

"Really!? Why?"

"Please wait —"

Sakurai pressed a few button on her cell phone and gave it to Manami.

"Here, Tamura-chan. Can you please read that part for Kousaka to listen?"

"Um…"

For someone who is bad with machines like Manami, she slowly looked at the screen —

— What is Kousaka doing? (class 2 girl)

— Kousaka the class rep has appeared! Last year I was in the same class with him (class 3 boy)

— During lunch break yesterday, Kousaka-kun asked everyone to make a greeting card for Sakurai-san! (same class girl)

— Kousaka is so annoying (class 3 girl)

"…That's what they said."

"Those bastarddddddddddds!"

I trusted them, yet they betrayed me?

Sakurai said:

"Look? Everyone is tired of you!"

"Mwuu…"

"From the looks of it, you forcefully made everyone to sign that. All of them agreed because you are so annoying, not because they are worried about me."

"— Hey."

I suddenly growled. I could no longer ignore Sakurai's words.

"What? Are you angry?"

"Of course. Do not repeat that no one at school is worried about you again. It's absolutely not possible."

"…"

Sakurai's eyes widened…

Oh damn… Is she angry?

I whispered to Manami:

"— Did I mess up?"

"No, it's not like that."

Manami shook her head and smiled with Sakurai:

"Sakurai-san… I hope that you can trust Kyou-chan's words."

"Um… well… it's not like I can't…"

Even those words are the same, but if Manami said that instead of me, everyone would believe it easily.

Why… I'm the famous class rep here…

"But… but if everyone were truly worried about me… then it's harder for me to go to school!"

"Why is it harder to for you?"

"Because —"

"Because?"

"Because it's embarrassing!"

Sakurai's face reddened, she spoke her true feelings.

"…It is, right?"

I laughed.

"What are you laughing about? What are you going to do?"

"Alright… your solution is…"

I suppressed my excitement and thought carefully —

I pat Sakurai's back.

"Then think about everyone too! Hey Sakurai, what would make you want to go to school again?"

"Ha… You should ask yourself that question."

"Is that the simplest solution?"

"Yes it is…"

Sakurai sighed.

"Now, I think that Kousaka is different from others."

Am I cool?

"Mwu…"

Sakurai became silent again. I casually asked:

"What are you thinking?"

"Hey! Why are you always butting into other people's troubles? Mind your own business!"

Sakurai yelled. But she quickly regained her usual mood afterward.

"Um — so — 'think of a reason to make want to go to school'… If I tell you that reason, will you do it?"

"Yes, leave it to me."

I grinned.

"Kyou-chan."

Manami sounded like she was scolding me.

"What about your promise?"

"Oh, that? But since we have come this far, we can't change her mind unless we do that."

It's meaningless if I just force her to come to school.

I have to let Sakurai think 'class rep Kousaka, I want to go to school.'

"Besides, speaking with her is unexpectedly fun. I would be happier if Sakurai came to school."

"So, Sakurai. Imagine that you are Kaguya-hime[2], tell me your wishes."

'The current me' would have never said something like that.

"……"

"What?"

Don't look at me like that, I'm embarrassed too.

Then, her eyes shifted from me…

"Hm… what should I do…?"

She laughed 'eheehee' and made an Ok hand signal.

"Ok, I got it. I accept your condition."

Sakurai sat down on her chair and said:

"Then, if Kousaka could buy what I asked, then I will go to school."

"What an easy request. Leave it to me."

I immediately replied. Manami was looking at me with a puzzle expression. Sakurai thrust her finger at me and said: "Then I won't hold back."

"Go to Hill's road and buy the limited time shop's mascot character."

"Sorry, I think I misheard you."

Limited time shop? Mascot character? What is that?

"Manami, do you know what Sakurai is talking about?"

"Um… I think that she is asking you to buy something for her…"

Seeing that, Sakurai showed a surprise expression.

"Hill's road means the road with lots of shops, alright?"

"Yeah, yeah."

Both Manami and I nodded.

"Limited time shop meant the shop at the apartment."

"Yeah, yeah"

"Mascot character — is a newly released cute one — its name is 'Kyou-chan.'"

"Kyou-chan?"

Manami looked at me.

"No, no, it's not me."

"Yes, yes, it's called 'My Lovely Angel Kyou-chan.'"

"You shut up for a minute!"

"Here, I will show you."

Sakurai spun in her chair and showed us a picture on her computer.

"Clang clang. Here is my favorite mascot 'Kyou-chan!'"

There was a small rabbit doll on the screen.

"Heehee, this is a character from a recent famous anime! Don't be shy, come and look at how cute he is!"

"Wow, so cute…"

Even Manami seemed excited.

"Cute? This one?"

I only felt angry when I looked at him.

"Hey, Sakurai, why does this rabbit look so sleepy… or rather, his eyes seem completely dull."

"Because he was abandoned by humans. Aren't his arrogant eyes cute?"

"They are not!"

"Ah —?"

"But he is so cute…"

Looks like I have completely different views compared to girls.

"If Kyou-chan had those kind of eyes too, I think that you would look even cooler."

"No thanks!"

Don't compare me to a doll. I definitely will not make those kind of arrogant eyes.

"Anyway, in short, you wanted me to buy this doll for you?"

"No, no. I wanted you to buy something with the picture of 'Kyou-chan' printed on it."

"What do you want then?"

"This one."

Sakurai showed me another picture.

— A pair of underwear.

"…Hey."

"Kousaka-san! I want you to buy these 'Kyou-chan underwear!'"

"How could you make such request!?"

"But you told me to imagine myself as Kaguya-hime!"

"Kuh… kuh… kuh."

I did say that… but I never thought it would turn into this.

"Eh? Could it be that it would be too difficult for a boy to buy girl's underwear from an underwear shop?"

Hey, did you make that unreasonable request in order to force me to give up?

Yeah, that did sound like Kaguya-hime.

"By the way, Kousaka is going to pay for them!"

Another attack. As a third year middle school student, going into an underwear shop to buy a pair of underwear is hard enough, but she wanted me to pay too?

"Just exactly how much do these 'rabbit underwear' cost?"

"¥3000."

"Tooooooooo expensiveeeeee!"

I immediately objected.

"Kyou-chan, you need to count the ticket cost to travel to that Hill's road too. Total cost would be around ¥1000."

"Ugh!"

…It's out of the question then. Even if I took all the money from both mine and my little sister's piggy bank it wouldn't be enough.

Any middle school student can confirm as to how restricted their money is.

In my opinion, Japan's subway's tickets are too expensive. Around ¥20 is okay.

"Heeheee… this is Akimi-hime's request. ❤ I will go to school if you fulfill this ♪. Although I think that your pocket money ~ will probably be a little tight ~♪."

"Ughhhhhhh…"

I felt very troubled.

Impossible… it's impossible…

"Ahahaha — what are you gonna do, class rep? Don't tell me you are going to say 'it can't be helped' and just give up? What a pity ~ I want to go to school ~ If Kousaka could fulfill my request, I will definitely go to school! I will even say this in front of the whole class 'Thank you, Kousaka-sama for giving me those underwear as a present' —"

What a pity ~ pity ~ Sakurai is clearly having fun.

I won. A landslide victory… She was probably thinking that way.

I grit my teeth and looked at Sakurai who was getting carried away — as if I could let it end like this.

"…Did you say?"

"Ah? What, what? Ehehehe, sorry, I didn't hear you ~"

"'I will definitely go to school' — did you say that?"

I grinned fearlessly. Manami gave me a puzzled look. I took a deep breath.

"In the world, there is nothing that could end with just 'It can't be helped!'"

I declared.

"Sakurai! Just leave it to me!"

That is my favorite line.

The scene goes back to — Tamura's household, second floor.

" — About that… it seemed that I have heard about it from you."

"Really?"

I'm not sure myself.

"Yes. Three years ago, you came home full of yourself. You said 'Kirino, your amazing onii-san is going to save his classmate's destiny' or something like that. Then the next morning you took the bicycle and rushed out of the house as soon as possible."

"…Did I say that? Something so humiliating?"

"Kyou-chan from three years ago really often said that."

My chest hurt —

I think that this old story was hurting me more than anything else.

It's not like I could brush it off by saying 'it's all in the past.' Sometimes, I remembered my old days too.

"Actually at that time, after saying something so cool, 'your trusted onii-san' was on his way to buy underwear!"

I don't want to know — Kirino muttered.

I didn't want to tell you that either. Could my story really help you two to make up?

"…By the way, that 'Kyou-chan' rabbit was one of the cards used by my opponent who beat me earlier in 'Imouto-City'."

"Last summer, Kyou-chan also gave me that 'Kyou-chan' pillow."

"Really?"

"Eh? Didn't you choose it because of that?"

"No, I chose it by coincidence."

"…Ha… But I was happy. Thank you, Kyou-chan."

"It's my pleasure."

Kirino deliberated coughed:

"So — what happened next?"

"Ah, next —

"How is that?! You wanted underwear; I have bought underwear for you!"

"Wh… What—?"

Two days after I received 'Akimi-hime's request.' In front of Sakurai's household.

Still in her pajamas, Sakurai looked at the underwear in my hand in shock.

" — Take it! You wanted it? Come on, put it on!"

"You are lying… You must be lying… You really bought them? For me?"

Sakurai snatched it away from my hand.

"Wow… it's still warm…"

That's because I was just holding it in my hand.

"Good. Put that on. Then come to school with me."

"…Kyou-chan is really… you made me feel embarrassed too."

"But it is cool, isn't it?"

I asked Manami who was standing next to me. She quickly replied "No it's not."

I turned back to Sakurai; she was carefully checking the underwear and cringed:

"Kuh… Oh… this really is 'Kyou-chan underwear'… but!"

"But!?"

"But surely you didn't buy it yourself! You must have asked your mother to help — in that case, you didn't fulfill my request!"

As expected of a princess. I knew that you won't accept defeat so easily — I already predicted that you would say that. I took out my cell phone and showed Sakurai my evidence picture.


キャー来た

"Take a look!"

"Pervert —!!!"

Sakura's reaction was outside of my expectations.

"Hey, hey, don't yell so soon in the morning! You will disturb others!"

"That's all your fault!"

Sakurai took another look at my cell phone's screen.

"How could it be…? I have given you a request that a boy would definitely be unable to fulfill… How could you take that perverted picture…?"

Sakurai looked very troubled.

On the other hand, as usual, my childhood friend was smiling wryly.

"Kyou-chan looked like he was having fun."

"Whatever."

True, it was very embarrassing. But I quickly regained my normal mood.

"Why did you wear those underwear?"

"Just a chance."

I fearlessly replied. Sakurai blushed madly, her eyes started to moisten.

"Giving a girl underwear that you already wore is major sexual harassment!"

"Hey, are you going to keep your promise? Go to school now."

"No, noisy! Yes, I have decided to go back to school starting today."

"Ha? Really?"

Now that I think back, my reaction back then was stupid.

"Yes. I'm not lying! Because of you… you…"

"Alright, alright, I know. So go get changed, okay?"

"…I was telling the truth."

And so.

I ignored my sense of shame and finally finished the S-class quest 'Make Sakurai go back to school.'

After that, I forgot all the nonsense Sakurai said about 'I have decided to go back to school.'

Am I cool? In such a short time, I made Sakurai come back to school.

— Did Sakurai-san really come back to school? (boy from the same class)

— Who ? (class 2 girl)

— Yesterday, Kousaka-kun declared that 'I will bring her to school the day after tomorrow.' Wasn't that why he skipped class today? Do you think that he could do it? (girl from the same class)

— Poor Sakurai-san. She was followed by a hot-blooded idiot. (class 3 girl)

— Is he normal? During a lunch break a few days earlier, he knelt down and practically begged everyone 'I want to let Sakurai know how fun school is, please help me' (boy from the same class)

— It is disgusting to see how hard he tried. Did he really do that? Could it be that he loves Sakurai-san? (class 3 girl)

— Nope, he would try equally hard even if it was a boy (boy from the same class)

— Hey, hey, could it be that he is GAY (class 3 girl)

— He is a hot-blood, that's for sure. Although he is not a bad guy, but I can't bring myself to like him (boy from the same class)

— But I'm happy to see Sakurai-san again after so long (girl from the same class)

— Me too me too! I was worried too (class 2 girl)

— Because Sakurai-chan is so cute — (boy from the same class)

— ↑ So all you care about is her face. Boys are all idiot (class 2 girl)

— I might even have a chance to see her during exercise. GJ, Kousaka (group of girls)

During our homeroom, my teacher told the rest of my class:

"Starting today, Sakurai will come back to school."

Yeahhhh —! The class roared in excitement.

…See, I promised you guys that I 'woulld bring her back.'

A girl sitting behind me whispered:

"Hey, hey, Kousaka-kun. What you said a few days earlier became true."

"So you guys don't trust me that much — I'm a man!"

I answered without looking back. She pat my back:

"Hee — you are so cool"

"Haha, do you like me already?"

"Ah — of course not!"

At that time, my teacher continued:

"Alright. Sakurai, come in."

"Yes."

The door was opened, and Sakurai came in in her uniform. I never thought she was the same girl with the messed up pajamas a few days earlier.

— She looked like a different person… Why doesn't she keep wearing that…?

Somehow, I felt a little embarrassed when I looked at her. Sakurai choose that time to speak —

"…Ah… Um…"

She paused.

"…Ah… That…"

She paused again.

— Hey, hey, what are you doing! Damn… I didn't expect this.

'Someone who doesn't want to go to school suddenly goes to school' — it caused quite a lot of pressure on her.

I never thought that far ahead. I was too optimistic to think that she would easily fit in with everyone.

Reality is not that simple…

"…Ah… um…"

She was unable to say anything…

…Not good. If she failed… she might… never want to return to school again…

…That was a bad calculation on my part. I — have to do something!

"Sakurai!"

Everyone's attention suddenly shifted to me.

"…Ah?"

Even Sakurai is shocked.

I will show you an example!

"Come on! Tell them how cool I was when I brought you back to school!"

"_____"

If you are too nervous to say anything; let me share your embarrassment!

Sakurai's eyes widened, she burst out laughing.

"What are you laughing for?"

"Because… are you… an idiot?"

She covered her mouth with her hand and laughed… Although it made me uncomfortable, at least she wasn't nervous anymore. Sakurai took a deep breath and said:

"I'm Sakurai Akimi. Please to meet you — everyone! It has been a long time!"

Wow —! Everyone started applauding.

There is no need for a leader, everyone started clapping their hands and whistled.

"…Wow…"

Seeing everyone's reaction, Sakurai had a bewildered look.

Because of her embarrassment, she was blushing.

I showed a smile and said, "See, didn't I tell you…"

Everyone was looking forward to see you again.

Mission complete. I whispered to myself.

Sakurai's expression relaxed…

"Heeheee… thank you everyone."

"Oh right, oh right. There is something I have to say — because of a promise."

"Hmmm?"

What is she saying? What promise?

Sakurai looked at me and said in embarrassment:

"Kousaka-sama, thank you for the underwear!"

She told my class about my disgusting method to bring her back school.

The same day, after school — in a nearby park.

Manami and I were sitting on a bench.

"Really… Sakurai… she really said that…"

"Ahahaha… homeroom wasn't over, yet all the boys already gathered around Kyou-chan's table, our class turned into chaos ~"

"It's not a laughing matter. I was planning to explain myself, but those girls were already screaming — and those boys had already rushed to my table — it was too late when our teacher intervened… Explaining things to them is going to be very troublesome!"

"Ah? But it is a misunderstanding, right?"

Yes, Yes.

"Unless I quickly solve this misunderstanding, I will be called PantsMan until I graduate."

"Didn't they call you that already?"

"For real?"

Damn… I knew nothing about it.

"Sakurai-san looks like she is having fun."

"Yeah."

She was immediately surrounded by our classmates. From the looks of it, she would be fine even without me now.

"That is why — Mission Complete."

"Good work Kyou-chan. You tried hard this time too."

"Heehee, of course."

I'm the famous class rep, but Manami still treats me the same. I have heard this line many times before, but I can't get enough of it… I felt happy every time she said that.

Or maybe…it's one of the reasons that kept me going. Maybe I went all out to help others in order for Manami to praise me.

"But Kyou-chan… You did try to act tough…"

"I'm not. I still act normal."

I don't like it when Manami denied something I did.

Manami shook her head.

"Kyou-chan is still so kind as usual…"

"Hey…"

Don't make it out like I'm an idiot.

"But recently I felt you aren't exactly the same as before."

"Where?"

"I'm not sure myself… I think you have a little anxiety."

"_____"

I couldn't say anything back because Manami hit the bull's eyes — no, not really.

Because she pointed out something about me that even I myself didn't know.

Because that was Manami, I unconsciously spoke my mind out:

"Ah? I… Anxiety? Why?"

Manami showed me a surprise expression — but she quickly smiled gently.

"Even you don't know. As expected of Kyou-chan."

"Hey, don't joke with me. I'm not feeling anxious."

It must have been a lie. When I talked with Manami, I felt very calm. To put it bluntly, I wouldn't worry even if I was going to die really soon. It's definitely not because we had known each other for a long time.

It's because she is Manami that I felt calm. If this was someone else, I would have kept trying to act tough.

"…Well yeah… you are right… I feel a little anxious. Like if I don't try harder something bad will happen."

Where did this feeling come from? I never felt this way during elementary school.

"…I see."

Manami listened to my unreasonable rant without a hint of boredom.

"I feel that Kyou-chan has tried hard enough."

"Yeah, I have tried hard."

Only the Kousaka Kyousuke from third year, middle school would say that.

"…I have tried hard, so why am I feeling anxious?"

"Maybe you felt that your effort was not accepted by others?"

"Hm… Maybe."

"Don't go over-thinking about it, okay? It's just my guess."

"No, no, it's something very important to me. Because… you understand me better than anyone. So I always rely on your help."

"…I see."

"I will keep depending on you from now on."

"Yes, no problem."

This was another normal day.

It has been two years and a half since I helped Rock during elementary school.

— I have to try harder —

My enthusiasm hadn't diminished, it had grown stronger.

After that, during the first semester, Sakurai often skipped school too. But at least she comes to school twice out of every three days.

Although she was welcomed by everyone, but it didn't look like she immediately wanted to go to school every day.

— I should show her how fun school is.

After I brought her back to school, I immediately set a higher mission for myself. That was what happened that day, when a girl asked me this:

"Class rep, will Sakurai come to the trip with our class?"

"Ah? How could I know?"

"Because, Sakurai-san will think that it's too much of a trouble."

"You are right."

Even without asking, I could guess that her reaction would be 'School trip? Pass, pass.'

"So I want to ask you to persuade Sakurai-san. You succeeded in bringing her back to school."

"You wanted me to persuade Sakurai?"

"Please. Everyone is looking forward to see Sakurai-san on this trip."

"I see… If you ask me… then I can't refuse."

I hit my chest:

"Just leave it to me!"

That is my usual, favorite line.

It's a good chance. I was thinking how to make Sakurai realize that school is fun! Haha… prepare yourself, Sakurai!

"As expected of the class rep. I leave it to you!"

"Yup! Oh right, right! I'm looking forward to my super cool 'school bookmark.' Be sure to support me!"

"Class rep! From the bottom of my heart, I beg you not to print your own photo on the school bookmark!"

"Ah, why?"

"Don't you get it? The school bookmark last year was ultra-bad!"

"But my family liked it"

"Who cares about your family?!"

And so, after school, I went to the game center near the bus station. Just like before, since Sakurai wasn't home, I thought that she could only be here.

"Bingo."

Yup, she is here. She is now resting, not playing.

"Hey — Sakurai, are you sleeping?"

I tried asking her. Still lying on the table, Sakurai said:

"…This is 'the last form of I-don't-wanna-go-to-school-posture.' I don't like it… I want to be free…"

What are you saying you idiot?

"What I meant to say is… I have no more motivation."

"Hurry and get up!"

I knocked on the back of her head, making the dummy girl yell.

"What are you doing?"

"That is my line. Why are you lying down like this?"

"Because… just thinking about 'the school trip' makes me tired…"

"Ah? So you know?"

"I heard that from our teacher yesterday. He asked me 'will you come?'"

"Hmph…"

"I'm not going."

"Why not?! Come on! It's super fun!"

"That…"

"Ha?"

"I don't like how everyone keeps telling me to go."

"Why — everyone said that because they want you to come…"

"That… ah… I see."

"So will you come?"

"Nope, I will not."

"Then tell me why."

"My body is very weak, it can't be helped."

Sakurai faked some coughs.

"It was too fake. I don't even want to yell at you anymore."

"I'm telling the truth… You see, I need my parents' approval to go on this trip right? My mother is away from home… so that can't be helped! Ah, what a pity."

"You could just write one yourself!"

She is making excuses. The problem is, in her opinion, school is more 'troublesome' than 'fun.'

Then I should —

"Okay, I get it."

I deeply nodded. Sakurai narrowed her eyes.

"I get a bad feeling from Kousaka's 'I get it.' Every time you say that, you actually don't get it at all."

"From now on, I will make sure you enjoy school with everyone!"

"What are you saying —?!"

"Come on, take a look at this! The school bookmark made by class rep Kousaka!"

"Hey, who would like a bookmark with a picture of you…? Is this one of our school's seven mysteries, the cursed bookmark?"

"Did the bookmark I made last year turn into one of the seven mysteries?"

"It was very famous back then!"

"Why am I the only one who knows nothing about it?"

"By the way, I got a good laugh that time — and I'm not the only one!"

"I will make you change your mind! You will receive divine punishment!"

"My current state is already divine punishment!"

Sakurai glanced at me:

"— So? Are you going to make me happy this time too? Can you make my bad mood go away?"

What if I said… I'm looking forward to it?

"…Hm…"

Joy welled up in my chest and showed up on my face.

"Hahahahaha! Of course! Just leave it to me!"

I showed her my notebook.

"Let me show you how fun this trip is! First we will take a bus to the camping site, and then we have an outdoor party. The next day we have mountain climbing —!"

"Ha…"

I ignored Sakurai's unhappy expression and maintained my brainwashing technique.

When the day of the trip arrived, everyone was happy.

"Hahaha… Look, they are acting like children!"

"Aha, Kyou-chan, you seem very excited!"

Manami gently scolded me.

"Haha, no way."

By the way, I was sitting in the middle of the last row of seats. Next to me were Manami and Sakurai.

That's right. I succeeded in convincing Sakurai.

"Ah ~ this is the first time I've been so far from home ~"

The beautiful hikikomori-sama kept her moist eyes on the glass windows.

She really didn't want to go, did she?

"Haha… but since you are here, don't ever think of running away."

"You are a villain!"

"Sa… Sakurai-san, do you want some snacks?"

"Yes please!"

Manami and Sakurai — they looked like a Chihuahua and her owner!

A lazy girl and a girl who loves to take care of others — they suited each other so much!

"Say, you have been in the same class for a long time, right?"

"Yes ~"

"Tamura-chan, Youko-chan and me."

"We both eat lunch together with Kyou-chan ~"

Hearing her name, Youko turned back to us from her seat.

"Someone called me? Want to play cards?"

"Ah ~ it's not bad ~ the snack is good ~ let's trade with each other."

"Hey Kousaka! Don't talk with girls all by yourself!"

"Too cheap! Let me join too!"

And so, some other classmates joined us —

"I was looking forward to this trip!"

"A girl's meal is the best!"

"Hey, you guys are going to help too."

"Boys have to learn how to make a meal!"

It turned into chaos.

Ah, before I forget. This is a three day two night trip. The first day we will set up camp to sleep. At night, we will split into groups of three and sleep together.

During our first day, both boys and girls will prepare lunch and dinner together. Thankfully I'm in the same group with Manami.

"Haha, I can promise you all that Manami's food is better than your mom's! Just you wait!"

*Clap clap* Boys in my group started clapping.

"Ky… Kyou-chan… your praise has gone too far."

She was so easy to embarrass. You are so good at cooking, why don't you take pride in that? Why do you always act so modest?

Next to us, Sakurai added:

"…You guys look like an old married couple…"

"Ah? What did you just say?"

"Nothing — Tamura-chan is very skilled, I'm also looking forward to her meal."

After that, Sakurai kept a distance from everyone else and took her cell phone out. Recently, cell phones could access the internet too, allowing her to play that imouto game.

"You really are a shut-in."

That happened in class too. She didn't talk with anyone.

"That's why I said I hate the camping trip. Say, when I first played Imouto-City, they said it was totally free to play. But now I have spent so much money in this, does that mean they lied to me?"

"And what could you do about that now?"

I understood that the first time you told me about it.

"Based on Akimi's prediction, it's definitely not normal! Why didn't I hate it, but instead kept playing?"

Yeah, I could see that.

I sighed and said:

"True, you aren't suited for a camping trip. But as I have said before — going on the same bus, cooking and eating together, making camp and sleeping together — climbing the mountain and enjoy the view — all of this is fun. I think it's more fun than your game or anything!"

The 'current me' would have never said that. The 'Me from that time' didn't understand her hobby, thus I overlooked it. Half of the reason was what I saw on TV, but the other half — was because of Sakurai.

Compared to Kirino, Saori or Kuroneko, Sakurai was just a low-tier otaku. But at that time, I thought that because she loved games, she was already a hikikomori. I thought that there was nothing good about them.

"Ah, sometimes I forget that you are a hot-blooded boy — well, I hope you are right too."

Although Sakurai said that while smiling slightly, she didn't look that way like she hoped I was right.

"Yes. These are our last activities during our middle school year — let's make it an unforgettable memory."

The bus had arrived at the camping site.

We had passed by a lake before, so everyone expected to be able to go fishing and the like —

"Amazing — just like a fantasy world in a movie! So beautiful! But it stinks ~ Ah! The air is so fresh, so why can't I breathe? Could it be that my body can't handle this pure fresh air?"

"…What a quiet place ~ It would be nice if I could just live here my whole life…"

However, everyone had their different opinions.

Today, we camped on wide open grassland.

As far as our eyes could see, we saw grass, trees and the blue sky. And our camping site!

Although it was quite hot, our class was overflowing with youth, thus the heat didn't affect us! Everyone changed into sports clothes and listened to the camp's manager and our teacher's reminder.

"Hey, hey, Kousaka, Tamura-chan, isn't that bad? This is grass! So hot! It stinks!"

However, the idiot above made my life miserable. Still, I managed to endure it.

We had lunch consisting of curry, and barbecue for dinner. Manami's skill allowed us to enjoy an excellent meal. After that was the first day's climax — the campfire. Everyone gathered around the campfire and had fun.

During that time — I took Manami and went to a quiet place.

"Ya — so fun! The school trip is so fun!"

"— Really, what are you saying, grandpa?"

"Nothing, granny."

I continued teasing my childhood friend.

"About that, it's almost 'respect our elders day.' I need to make sure to pay a visit to my grandmother on my dad's side of the family."

"Ahaha, Kyou-chan, how is your granny doing?"

Manami knew my grandmother too.

"I heard that she got in an accident while farming. I didn't see her in the summer, so I planned to visit her this autumn."

"Really? I didn't hear anything about it."

"Ah, well, it's not anything worth mentioning. She still sounded normal. Last time I spoke with her via telephone, she gave me a machinegun-like rant."

I need to clarify, but my granny and Manami's granny were quite different. My granny dotes on us a lot, but sometimes she is very unreasonable.

How could my grandpa marry such a woman? I always felt that was a difficult question. Could it be that he is an M?

He said, "One day you will understand too" — what a bad omen.

"So I planned to go meet them, tell them about this camping trip to cheer them up and beg them for some pocket money."

"You aren't honest with yourself. You clearly want to meet them."

"I… I'm not."

"But… it's nice to have such a good relationship. I also want to visit Kyou-chan's grandparents too."

"Oh? How about we go together?"

"Ah… but, can I?"

"Yes. I planned to pay respect for you on that 'respect our elders day' too."

"Hey~ What do you mean by that ~! I'm going to get angry."

My childhood friend hit me on the shoulder.

In front of us, in the distance was the campfire.

The night was very comfortable. We didn't feel hot or cold.

This made me remember my granny. It might be a bit too blunt to say it, but she always made me feel calm. Even as reckless as I was, I always enjoy spending time with my granny.

"I always think about my granny whenever I speak with you. I still don't know why though."

Hearing that, Manami smiled:

"I don't know if I should feel happy or not when you say that."

"Haha, whatever. Still, although granny is very scary if she gets angry, she is the forgiving type."

"I see. Then I could rest assured."

Manami is always calm. She could make other people around her feel calm too. I have never seen my gentle childhood friend get angry.

" —— So warm."

" —— Um."

We sat side by side, looking at the fire.

— To tell the truth, this school trip was soooooooo fun!

I started to feel sleepy.

Suddenly, Manami asked:

"Say, Kyou-chan."

"Um?"

With sleepy eyes, I turned and see that Manami was looking down. Maybe because of the fire, her face was slightly reddened.

"Even after we become high school students, let's stay together like this."

"Of course. It has been ten years — I think that we could spend our entire lives together."

"Really? Do you think so too?"

"Um."

"…Really?"

She gently smiled.

"Even in that case, it's not bad."

"I know, right?"

I grinned.

"Um."

She seemed like to be in a good mood. If she had a tail, I bet she would have been shaking it in happiness.

Since I was in a good mood myself, I could tell that Manami was feeling the same.

Normally, I couldn't do that, but today we understood each other.

It made me very comfortable. That's right; I would always calm down whenever Manami was around.

It's so hard to understand.

She is a middle school girl, but somehow my childhood friend seemed like a granny to me.

"Maybe being ordinary is something amazing too."

I unconsciously said that. Even I didn't know why I said it back then.

I thought that she would ask me what I meant, but she didn't.

"How about — Kyou-chan becomes ordinary too?"

"Haha."

At that time, I thought 'it's not so bad'…

But I replied.

"Maybe later. I want to try a bit more."

Why did I try so hard? Even I didn't know — but since elementary school, an anxious feeling had gradually built up inside my chest. I always feel that I have to do something.

In fact, that feeling had only gotten stronger since then.

"I see… but please don't be so reckless."

"Um."

"I will always be by Kyou-chan's side."

There is no need to say that.

"— I know. I have known it for a long time."

After the first day, we went back to our tent and sleep. If this was a manga, then the event 'go to the girls' tent would be next,' but unfortunately this is reality.

We didn't sneak into the girls' tent, nor do they try to sneak into our tent.

We just slept like a stone.

The next day, I woke up at five; fully awake.

I quietly left my tent and enjoyed the nice weather.

Today is a beautiful day too.

"Hm — Yah…… Not bad."

Compared to yesterday, I felt the weather today was much better. A night in a tent really did have some effect.

Yesterday was the first time Sakurai had gone on a camping trip; we managed to do some indoor and outdoor activities together. Maybe I should go with my family sometime.

Although my relationship with my little sister had become a little strange recently.

When I asked her to come with me to the Cultural Festival —

"…Sorry. I can't go."

"I see. Do you have anything more important to do?"

"Yes. I want to go to the sport center."

"Sport center? You?"

Because my little sister is so bad at exercise, I doubted my own ears when I heard her say that.

"I… I'm not going to do anything. I just want to watch a track competition."

"Hm — mmmm."

At that time, I didn't pay much attention to my little sister's words.

Now thinking back — maybe since that day, Kirino had already started trying.

"Ah right… right! Ah… during the previous sports competition, I ranked first in the walking contest!"

"Hmph — when I was in elementary school I was ranked first too."

If I had a time machine, I would really want to go back in time and knock on this idiot's head.

"Of course I know that. Onii-san is amazing!"

"Right, right. Praise me more."

"Why don't you join the track and field team?"

"……"

"That hurts! Why did you hit me?!"

"So noisy! I'm going!"

— Something like that happened.

Why didn't I join the track and field team — because when I entered middle school, I found out that my leg strength was not that good.

I was fast — but that was only during elementary school.

I was still able to get the top grades without having to study too hard — that was only during elementary school.

Well, I still have great grades now.

"That's how ordinary it is."

Today, I could finally fully admit this in front of my little sister. But back then, I couldn't.

"Maybe I should wait for Manami… but for how long…?"

"Did you call me, Kyou-chan?"

"Wow!"

She suddenly showed up right next to me!

"Manami. Don't sneak up on me like that!"

"Ah?"

"Forget it, what are you doing?"

"I'm taking a morning walk."

"You got up so early."

Just like a granny. I planned to get up early too, but she woke up even earlier.

"Because it's very refreshing and comfortable — do you want to walk together?"

"Yeah. We can watch the sky together."

"Um."

Really… Manami's 'activities' were always old-fashioned, totally in contrast to Sakurai's. Probably because of that people called her plain and uninteresting.

I walked side by side with Manami.

The second day, our plans included eating at a camping hotel, leaving our luggage behind and taking the bus to the mountain for hiking.

"I'm too weak for hiking. I strongly object!"

On the bus, in the last row of seats, Sakurai spoke some discouraging words.

"Sakurai-san, if you like you could take the cable car to the top of the mountain ~"

"Really! I will take it then!"

"Manami, don't give her unnecessary information. I have already checked, this mountain is already suited for beginners."

People said you could get to the top in just one hour. It's just a little longer than the distance an elementary school student goes each day."

Besides, the view is probably great. I'm looking forward to this.

We arrived at under the mountain. There were a lot of shops nearby, selling souvenirs and native things. We divided into groups and listened to our teacher's reminder:

"Although it's not a difficult road — if anyone doesn't feel well please speak up."

Before Sakurai could said 'Me, me, me.' I suppressed her.

"Um um um um … (don't block my mouth.)"

"It's not your body that doesn't feel well, it's your mind."

"Don't you think you are a bit too much?"

"Yeah, yeah! Let's go! Target: top of the mountain! I can see it! The majestic view!"

"Ah ~ what about the cable car ~? You could see the view much better from the cable car."

"Are you an idiot? You can't enjoy the view unless you go up on your own legs. Otherwise, it would be the same as seeing them via website or TV. If you said your body isn't feeling well, you will be left in the dust all alone."

"Uh… it seems to be very boring…"

"I know, right?"

"…Kyou-chan, seems like you have gotten used to convincing Sakurai-san," said Manami.

"Really? Hm, it's just like taking a dog out for a walk."

"Hey! I can hear you!"

While chatting, Manami and I led our six-student team on the hiking trails. At the foot of the mountain, there were a lot of flowers and trees, like a park, but the deeper we went inside the more rock we encountered.

Looking at the long way ahead made my adventure-seeking heart race. Truly, I love this stuff. Without thinking, I alone had caught up with the group in front of me.

"Hey!"

Since I'm the group leader, I need to take care of my team! I stopped, turned my head back —and waited.

"Please slow down guys —"

Two of my teammates passed by me. A few dozen seconds later —

"Ho… Ha… ha… hoh… I'm… gonna… die…"

"Are you okay, Sakurai-san ~?"

Manami showed her concern for Sakurai, who was barely able to breathe. I spoke my true feelings out.

"You are so miserable. It hasn't been 30 minutes since we started."

"Ha — ha — That was why I told you… my body is very weak…"

"Yeah, I see that now. I thought it's just your excuse to not go to school."

Not only is your body weak, but I think it's more accurate to say that you lack stamina.

"If you can't walk anymore, how about I piggyback you to the top?"

"Ah~? No, no, there is no need…"

So you're still capable of being embarrassed?

"But… I will ask you if I truly can't walk anymore."

So you still can keep going.

"I understand — then please try your best. After enduring such hardship, the view from the top surely will be very beautiful."

"…Ha… ha… It better be."

"Sakurai-san, if your body doesn't feel well, we could ask the teacher to take you back to the foot of the mountain…"

Sakurai shook her head and refused Manami's negative proposal.

"…I have come this far, so I'd better keep going till the end. If I went back now, it would be even more meaningless."

"That's right."

I grinned.

Truly, Sakurai is lazy. But if it's something she thinks is 'interesting,' she would give it her all.

So, what I have to do is enjoy this trip with her.

"Then — I will take the last position. Please ask someone else to take the lead."

I shouted to my fellow classmates and slowed down.

Manami, Sakurai and I — the three of us walked side by side.

When we arrived at the top of the mountain another 30 minutes had passed.

In a clearing ahead, my classmates were chatting and joking with each other. They seemed to be taking a break after hiking. And about Sakurai —

"Finallyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy ———"

She managed to arrive here on her own legs.

Despite having almost thrown up multiple times, whenever I offered to piggyback her to the top she always stubbornly shook her head and continued walking.

To show my admiration of her, I pat her back:

"You have done it Sakurai! You are amazing!"

"It hurts so much! Don't pat me like that! Ah — I'm soooooo tired! I feel like I'm going to die right now!"

Sakurai dropped her bag on the ground and sat down immediately. She was drenched in sweat; breathing hard, she had probably run out stamina. Manami gave her an ice-cooled water bottle.

"Sakurai-san. Here."

"Ah… Tamura-chan… Thank you."

*Gulp gulp gulp* She drank the whole bottle in one go.

"Sakurai, take a break."

"I can't walk anymore ~"

"Haha, I see, I see."

"What are you happy for? I'm gonna take the cable-car down. I'm already so tired."

"Yes, you have done well. But I want to show you something else."

"Ha ~~~~~~~?"

She had never sounded so unwilling before.

I smiled wryly and gave her my hand.

"Alright, give me your hand."

"…What are you going to do?"

"Just take my hand."

"Ah — what are you thinking?"

Sakurai took my hand.

"Hey — yo."

I pulled Sakurai to a standing position.

"Alright, let's go."

"…To where?"

" — Just come."

I looked around and searched for a good position. Unfortunately — since we arrived late, all the good places had been taken by other people.

But it wasn't a problem. That was the time for Kousaka Kyousuke to shine.

" — Alright"

My eyes stopped at 'this place.'

"Over here. That is not a bad place."

That place was higher than everywhere else, with a visible rock level.

From there, we could surely see the view of this mountain.

"Let's go!"

"Ah, wait, wait."

Just like a rabid dog following food, I rushed forward. Although I wasn't as fast as I was in elementary school, I was still fast.

I easily jumped over the rope that was between myself and 'this place.'

"Yeah!"

In an instant, I had already climbed to the top of the rock. From there, I took a look toward the mountain's base.

"Wow — just like I imagined!"

There were no words to describe it aside from 'awesome.' I could see the rock-filled trails, the thick green forest and the mountain peaks. Although there is an old saying that only an idiot would enjoy a high place, but seeing this was worth being called idiot.

Full of excitement, I yelled to Sakurai below:

"Sakurai! Come here! It's awesome up here!"

"Are you an idiot?! I'm not a monkey like you, I'm a human! And I'm already beyond tired!"

"Can you stop your mouth for a second?"

I cursed. We didn't mind such bad language anymore.

Next to Sakurai was Manami, she also looked up to me.

"Kyou-chan, it's dangerous ~"

"It's fine, this is child's play."

Still, it wasn't right to ask my childhood friend to climb here.

She had fallen down on a park before and broke her glasses at this time. Falling down from here probably was going to hurt much more, not to mention there weren't many places to put your feet on here… Still…

No matter what, I want to let Sakurai see this scene

— I want to let Sakurai see how much fun a school trip is.

That was my main mission when I came here.

I will definitely make it a success. I said 'just leave it to me.'

"Sakurai! Come here!"

So I reached down to Sakurai and offered my hand. If she couldn't climb up, then I will pull her to me. It would be such a waste to not see this after coming this far — that was what I thought at that time.

Sakurai looked at my extended hand in confusion.

"Really, I already told you that I'm beyond tired."

She smiled wryly and took my hand. I could tell that she clenched my hand hard.

"You are so forceful. I won't help you if Tamura-chan gets angry."

"Why are you mentioning Manami now?"

Besides, what do I have to be afraid of Manami if she got angry?

"Ha… Ho!"

I pulled her to me. The space to put our feet was very limited, so I was very close to Sakurai.

"Ho… What a heavy task."

"Hey, don't make it sound like I'm heavy."

"I think that you are around 52 kilograms."

"I'm not that heavy! I only weigh 41 kilograms!"

Sakurai took a deep breath and looked at the scene in front of her.

"Alright, alright — and so…"

To change the topic, I said:

"— Look Sakurai. Enjoy this awesome view with me!"

"Hm, so what?"

I am the one who brought Sakurai to this place.

To tell her that school is a fun place; that school is not somewhere that she should hate.

It was simple, but I had to try my hardest to show her that. Now, whether my work was a meaningless struggle or not depended on her answer.

I originally thought that 'butting into other's affairs' wasn't a bad thing.

But still, I hope for a good reply.

So I glanced at Sakurai.

She was looking forward — she didn't seem like she heard me

"Ah… they probably couldn't hear us up there… so, ah, Kousaka…"

"Yes?"

"— You are so annoying."

"Ah?"

That wasn't the answer I expected. I was shocked.

Sakurai laughed and said:

"Um… hehee, what? Did you expect me to say 'Oh, what a beautiful scene! I'm so moved!' like that?"

"Yes…"

That's normal, right?

"But I can feel your passion. You better remember, not everyone will thank you because you do so many things for them. That's advice from the beautiful Akimi for you."

Although Sakurai sounded like she was joking, I could tell that everything she said was her true feelings.

Although I also had prepared myself… but I was a bit… no, I was deeply hurt.

"…I, everything I did for you, all of this is just butting in your business… isn't it?"

"!"

Hearing my response, first, Sakurai was surprised, then she narrowed her eyes.

"I-di-ot!"

"What?"

Did she just scold me?

Seeing my eyes widen in surprise, she looked to the side.

"Idiot — idiot. Idiot — idiot. You, not only you are so annoying, you are also a big idiot."

"…Oh! I have no idea what you are thinking! Say, the one who call others an idiot is the idiot!"

I raised my objection:

"— Please say it in a language that I can understand!"

"Oh ~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~"

Sakurai bit her lips, she looked very troubled.

"What I meant is, I ——"

She turned to face me and was about to say something.

But at that time, maybe she turned too fast —

"Ah — "

"!Sa… Sakurai!"

Even until now, I still don't know what she was about to say.

I tried to reach to Sakurai who was losing her balance in a futile attempt to catch her.

The end result —

Our fun school trip ended in the worst way possible.

Just as I had hoped, it became one of my unforgettable memories.

— I heard that Sakurai got a bone fracture because of Kousaka?

— Yes, I heard that was because Kousaka asked her to go hiking. She was injured because Kousaka led her into an off-limit, danger zone.

— Really? It's so horrible.

— Poor Sakurai. It would be better if Kousaka himself got injured.

— Anyway, so that is the reason our school trip was ended one day early?

— We are also angry too.

— Recently, this guy is all full of himself. I already thought that someday he would cause something like this.

— But I heard that Sakurai's parents are away from home?

— I heard that Sakurai's parents caused chaos at school. Seems like Sakurai didn't have her parent's approval to join in this trip.

— There is a rumor that Kousaka told her to make a fake one.

— I got the feeling that he would do that too.

— Since the beginning, he already boasted that he will bring Sakurai back to school.

— So what is Kousaka's punishment?

— I saw him go into the teacher's office, but nothing happened. So is he going to attend school as usual?

— Ha? After what he did? For real?

— Yes. Still he is a class rep, so they probably put him off.

— This time, this is… Unforgiveable.

After the school trip ended on the second day, we took the bus back to Chiba. I didn't remember what happened on the way back. When I recovered, I realized that I was about to apologize to the rest of the class. It was so embarrassing that I wanted to commit seppuku.

"I'm back…"

"— Kyousuke, I have something to tell you."

That was when I heard the news that my granny had passed away.

"…Aaaahh"

Bad things kept happening to me — at that time, I didn't think that anyone in the world would understand me. Everyone will eventually have a family member pass away, but that was the first time I experienced that feeling.

"…It… couldn't… be…"

Just like everyone else, when I heard that news, my head was full of conflicting emotions… However, in the end, I didn't think about them anymore…

Please allow me to tell the truth with a repentant heart.

At that time, all I could think of was Sakurai and what happened during the school trip —

The person I loved the most had just died. I will never, ever see her again. Yet aside from that, I can't stop and think about her.

"About that, it's almost 'respect our elders day.' I need to make sure to pay a visit to my grandmother on my dad's side of the family."

"Ahaha, Kyou-chan, how is your granny doing?"

What a joke.

— Before the school trip, everything was fine… now everything was ruined.

"Damn… why did it turn out like this…?!"

I slammed on my bed.

The next day — originally, this day was the third day of the trip, but because of me it turned into a boring self-study session.

Mom had already gone back to the country side. Dad was going to be here soon.

After a night, I barely managed to recover my normal way of thinking. I made up my mind to do 'something that must be done' — or rather my last mission — before going to school.

I purposely changed my route to school to avoid Manami and went to school by myself.

— Today, I will properly apologize to everyone.

Before I do this, I don't want to meet Manami. My childhood friend probably already heard the news from my Mom; I don't want to hear some kind comfort.

"……"

I opened the classroom's door and immediately faced with a horrible atmosphere. An eye-catching empty seat caught my attention. The moment I entered the classroom, everyone's attention was on me. The room fell silent.

The silence continued for a few seconds — before it turned into a series of whisper.

Manami looked at me like she was about to cry.

Bathed in the hateful and criticizing gazes, I walked to my seat. At that time, someone called me from behind.

"Hey, don't you have something to say?"

That was one of my classmates.

"…I do."

I dropped my bag at my seat and went back to the podium at the front of my class.

I took a look at everyone and bowed.

"I'm sorry, everyone! Because of me, the school trip had been cancelled. I'm very sorry!"

"Ha?"

"Are you kidding me?"

"How are you going to take responsibility for this!?"

"What about Sakurai-san?"

"What if she can't come to school again?"

One after another, their voices rang out. Each of their words stabbed my heart like a knife.

That was normal. That was acceptable. That was what I thought back then.

In this world, you can't just fix everything by apologizing.

I have to do something. No matter what. But I don't know what should I do — that feeling is unbearable. I spent the entire night thinking about it, but I couldn't think of anything. I can't immediately heal Sakurai's wounds. I can't make her smile and go to school again. I can't convince the school for another school trip. I'm so powerless. I can't do anything.

I don't even know how to end this. I can only apologize.

That was all I could do now.

"Today, after school, I will visit Sakurai. After I apologize to her, if her injury is better, I will ask her to come to school again."

"Are you going to repeat your mistake?"

"You didn't reflect did you?"

"You'll just make more problems for Sakurai-san."

"Her parents will kick you out immediately. Why can't you see that?"

"It's better if you don't do anything."

So what do you guys want me to do? I screamed in my heart.

But I didn't care. I was going to do what I felt like I should do.

"You can say whatever you want to me. You can hit me for all you like! But please! When Sakurai comes back school, please continue like normal! Please smile with her, play with her, have fun with her! Although another school trip is impossible, don't let our last year in middle school end like this!"

"It's not your turn to say that!"

"Didn't it turn into that because of you?!"

"How are you going to take responsibility then?"

"What is the point of beating you? It will only ease your responsibility, making you feel better."

"You still want to take the show? Scum!"

My solution was just like pouring oil onto fire, everyone's rage keeps increasing.

The classroom turned into chaos. Everyone kept shouting, the atmosphere was about to explode —

*BANG*

A loud sound shut everyone up.

Everyone turned toward the source of the sound.

"_____"

Everyone froze.

"— Everyone, please be quiet."

Because that was Manami.

"…Tamura…?"

"You too Kyou-chan, please come back to your seat."

Manami's voice was gentle like usual. She was smiling her smile like always.

But there was a difference. There was courage.

That was my first time seeing Manami getting angry.

"Youko-chan…"

"Yes?"

"'Please make Sakurai-san come back to school' — Youko-chan is the one asking Kyou-chan for that, right? Besides, when Sakurai-san stepped on the bus, did you voice your objection? But why did you put all of the blame on Kyou-chan's head now and scold him like everyone?"

"Ah, because… because…"

"Um? Because?"

"…"

She didn't say anything. Manami didn't wait for her as she continued:

"Because when you check the message board, everyone wanted to do that — because of that atmosphere, right?"

"!?"

"I already know how to look at the phone message's board."

Her voice was the same, but her aura was different.

"Ah, it's not nice to do that. I think it's unacceptable — so, Youko-chan. Since you are that message board's administrator, please take care of it."

"Ah… how could you know?"

"Can you delete it all?"

Manami kept smiling.

"Use your administrator's role and delete them all… can you?"

"Ah? Right… right now?"

"Yes, immediately."

"……"

"Hurry up."

Faced with Manami's overwhelming pressure, she quickly took her cell phone out and did something.

"All deleted. Is that okay?"

"Um, thank you. Please make sure such a message board doesn't appear again."

Manami was talking with the same tone 'please don't get up late tomorrow,' but she was so scary.

With her gentle voice, Manami said, "Everyone, I have something to tell you."

"…Because someone in this class worried that 'Sakurai-san didn't come to school' and wrote it into the manual so Kyou-chan did that as usual. So if

Sakurai-san didn't come to school, she wouldn't get injured and the school trip wouldn't be cancelled."

"Hey — Manami, it's not that simple…"

"From the result, what you all just said is 'It's better if Sakurai-san didn't come to school.'"

"Do you want me to slap you?!"

I can't stop myself from saying that. Even if this came from Manami.

Manami looked hurt. She looked down.

"Just now… the conversation with Kyou-chan and everyone… was actually that."

"!"

"Someone worried about Sakurai-san and wrote that into the manual. Brought Sakurai-san back to school, allowed her to take part in this school trip, encouraged her to go hiking, showed her the view… Kyou-chan volunteered for all of that. Although the end result wasn't what I expected, but even that, I don't want to say that everything he did, all the effort he paid was a mistake."

"…Manami."

"The ones who are responsible for this, first is Sakurai-san who was careless to get an injury. Second is Kyou-chan. And third is everyone. Not only you didn't stop Kyou-chan, you even fanned the flames. So that's why I think that everyone doesn't have the right to scold Kyou-chan —"

Still smiling, Manami said:

"That was everything I wanted to say."

No one said anything.

After that, Manami looked directly into my eyes and concluded:

"It was regrettable, but it can't be helped."

After I saw 'Manami getting really angry' for the first time, Dad and I visited Sakurai at the hospital.

Facing her mother — I bowed and begged her to talk with Sakurai, but…

'I will not allow my daughter to go back to that school.'

'I heard that you forced her into that trip.'

'This was all your fault.'

'Don't appear before me again.'

— That was what she said.

Even the hot-blood idiot I am had been defeated.

The meeting between 'me from three years ago' and a classmate who refused to go to school.

'Sakurai Akimi' is one of the most important reason for 'the current me.'

But please don't misunderstand.

Both 'Sakurai's incident' and 'my granny's dead' — those painful events — weren't the reasons that created a shadow on my mind and completely changed my characteristic.

The true reason… Please continue listen to me.

After I my father left, he had to go back to his parent's home, when I opened the front door, I saw my little sister burying her face into her knees on the sofa. Maybe she cried herself to sleep. Because just like me, she loves granny too.

I made the most natural reaction and poured a cup of coffee for her.

"Want to drink?"

"……"

Kirino slightly looked at me and nodded without saying anything.

"I'll leave it here."

"…Um."

Kirino slowly took a slip from the cup of coffee and said:

"…Aniki, you are amazing."

"What amazing?"

" *Sob*…You didn't cry."

"Of course."

I will not cry in front of you.

Besides, I knew that this isn't the time to cry.

Our favorite granny had passed away. My little sister was crying.

I should have done something for Kirino

— Just leave it to me.

I couldn't say that to my little sister.

— Why did it happen?

'In this world, you can't just fix everything with an apology.'

How did it turn into this? For a long time, I had believed that — no, I had made that my belief. So why did it turn so fucking useless at this critical moment?

It even turned into an obstacle.

I realized that there were many things I could have said to comfort my little sister, but I couldn't say it out loud.

"…Is it good?"

"…Um… a bit too bitter."

"Haha, I see. Maybe I took too long."

"Tomorrow… will we… go to them?"

"I heard that after a while, they will come and pick us up."

"…Then… Before that… I have to cry enough… I will try to become more mature, just like onii-chan… I will try… harder…"

"……"

I could understand Manami's feeling now… Seeing my little sister like that, my heart hurt too.

However, in the end — the normal middle school student Kousaka Kyousuke could only stay by his little sister's side before she cried herself to sleep.

When I put the blanket on my little sister's sleeping form, the doorbell rang. I opened it and met Manami.

"Is something wrong?"

"Yesterday, your Mom asked me to… take care of Kyou-chan."

"Did she ask you to look after me?"

"Yes. I kept thinking about what I can do, and — have you eaten dinner?"

Manami showed me her bag full of food.

"…Thank you. Not only at school; I have caused trouble for you at home too."

"Didn't we agree not to talk about it anymore, father?"

To ease the atmosphere, I said:

"Hey Manami, is that what a girl tells her dad before she get married?"

"I'm a young student!"

"Haha, you are right."

I felt a little better now.

We chatted while making dinner. Because my little sister was sleeping in the living room, so we went to my room instead.

It was so good to have a warm meal when you felt down.

"I'm full. It's good."

"Please forgive me if it's bad…"

"No problem."

"If that's okay with you, how about you bring Kirino-chan to my home too?"

Ah… this is not a bad suggestion. Tamura's family would probably welcome us and help ease our pain.

"No… forget it. It's unnecessary."

First, I don't want to wake up my sleeping little sister. Second, recently she seemed to avoid Manami. I'm not sure what the reasons were back then, but thinking back, it was probably that.

Manami… looked directly into my eyes

"I understand."

She gave up.

"Ah… that tea is good."

"Ahaha, thank you."

Although Manami only stayed by my side… that was enough for me.

We drank tea in silence for a while.

I took a deep breath and said:

"Say, Manami."

"Yes?"

"Can I talk with you for a bit — life counseling."

"Sure you can."

Actually, I didn't expect much.

I just wanted someone to listen to my problems, that maybe she would think of something. So I told her about Sakurai, about my granny, about my doubt with my little sister — all of my chaos, messed up thought.

No, all of that was just an excuse.

"— Why did that happen?"

I don't want to take my anger out on anyone. I only want to help others.

I looked down and forced my words out:

"Why did that happen? I never thought… true, I was butting into other's business… But I only wanted to do what I think is right!"

"…Calm down, Kyou-chan."

*Bang* I slammed on the table. My hand and my chest hurt.

"Why did it all turn into my fault? Everything! Sakurai… Granny… Why…? Why…?"

I grit my teeth, but I let out a disgraced sob.

"Why did that happen? My little sister was crying! I'm her aniki…! I should have said something to her; I should have done something for her…! I couldn't do anything! I'm not like that! I don't want to be like that! Damn it! Damn it damn it damn it!"

What a mess. I didn't even know what I was saying.

But… everything I said were my true feelings.

Everything was my naked, deepest, truest feelings.

Middle school, third year — Kousaka Kyousuke.

My heart was full of anger. I wanted to crush everything in my room. It was so painful that I wanted to cry — but all I could do was cry.

The 'ideal me' would never cry.

If I turned back now, my heart would remain unbroken.

But because of that, my heart was thinking 'I couldn't do anything, but I have to do something' — so I turned against myself instead.

"Kyou-chan."

"Damn it —!"

*Bang* I slammed on the table again. My hand hurt, but I didn't care.

*Bang*Again! *Bang*.*Bang*. Again!

And then she stopped me.

"— Kyou-chan."

My gentle childhood friend.

"Calm down."

"____"

I think that I'm a happy man.

The 'I can't do anything' point in everyone's life will happen sooner or later.

But today, she was with me. She gently hugged me.

I was happy. So happy that I wanted to cry.

"…Manami." I was crying. I cried after asking her for 'life counseling.' "…I have spoken with Sakurai's parents. She… will not come back to school…"

"Um."

"They said… everything is my fault."

"That's wrong."

"I can't keep my promise to visit granny with you… She is gone… My little sister was crying… But I couldn't comfort her…"

"……"

"…I planned to take responsibility for the school trip. I planned to convince Sakurai to come to school again. I wanted to show her how fun school is. Because I'm her class rep. Then I want to kick the crap out of the reason that made my little sister cry, because I'm her aniki… Everything… everything… is something I must do, something I have to do…"

My lip was bleeding. I had bitten it too much.

"— But I couldn't. No matter how much I think about it, I can't think of anything. I wanted to say 'just leave it to me' as usual… but the truth is… I can't do anything."

I can't accept that. It was shameful. If that continued, I was afraid that I would lose myself. So I asked, trying to get an answer, something to depend on.

"Manami… what do you think I should do?"

"It's fine if you don't do anything."

She hugged me closer to her chest, Manami gently said:

"Kyou-chan is always like that. Whenever someone is in trouble — you can't stand it. You think 'It can't be helped' and say 'just leave it to me' and try to take care of it all alone. Isn't that because you want to make an

image of 'an awesome cool onii-san' in your little sister's mind? But when faced with something that you couldn't do, Kyou-chan — you don't have to face it that way."

"— Because Kyou-chan is just an ordinary boy."

That was what placed a shadow in my mind.

— I might not be the one to say this but I'm an ordinary high school student — [3]

Even three years later, I still considered myself that way.

Those words hit my weakness.

"…I see. I'm an ordinary boy."

"Yes. Normal. Just like me."

It's not like I don't know that. Actually, I had noticed it long ago. That I'm not special or anything. Just a normal, ordinary boy.

But since I broke my own seal, 'It can't be helped,' I always tried to take care of everything — 'just leave it to me.'

"…Why am I always trying to act tough?"

"Because you want to show off."

"To whom?"

"To me — and to your little sister."

"Kirino? Me? I want to show off to her?"

"Yes. Isn't that right?"

If it was only Manami, I could have agreed, because truely, I really did that.

But — to Kirino.

"Kyou-chan, whenever you talk with me, you always speak about 'how I show off in front of my little sister.'

"…Did I…"

"I don't remember. But what if Manami is right…?

"About that — Kyou-chan."

She hugged me tighter.

"I like you. It doesn't matter if you are amazing or not, even if you aren't trustworthy, that you are slow, that you aren't good at studying, that you aren't special — I won't hate you because of that. Because I know better than anyone how hard you tried."

"But… but what if I meet something I can't solve?"

I repeated my question from earlier.

Manami said:

"Kyou-chan is an idiot."

"When you are faced with something you can't do, you could just say 'it can't be helped.' If you don't give up no matter what, maybe someone will call you cool but you won't be happy. Besides, I think that only a special individual could do that. But Kyou-chan is not."

"…You are right. I'm not."

"Really?"

"Yes."

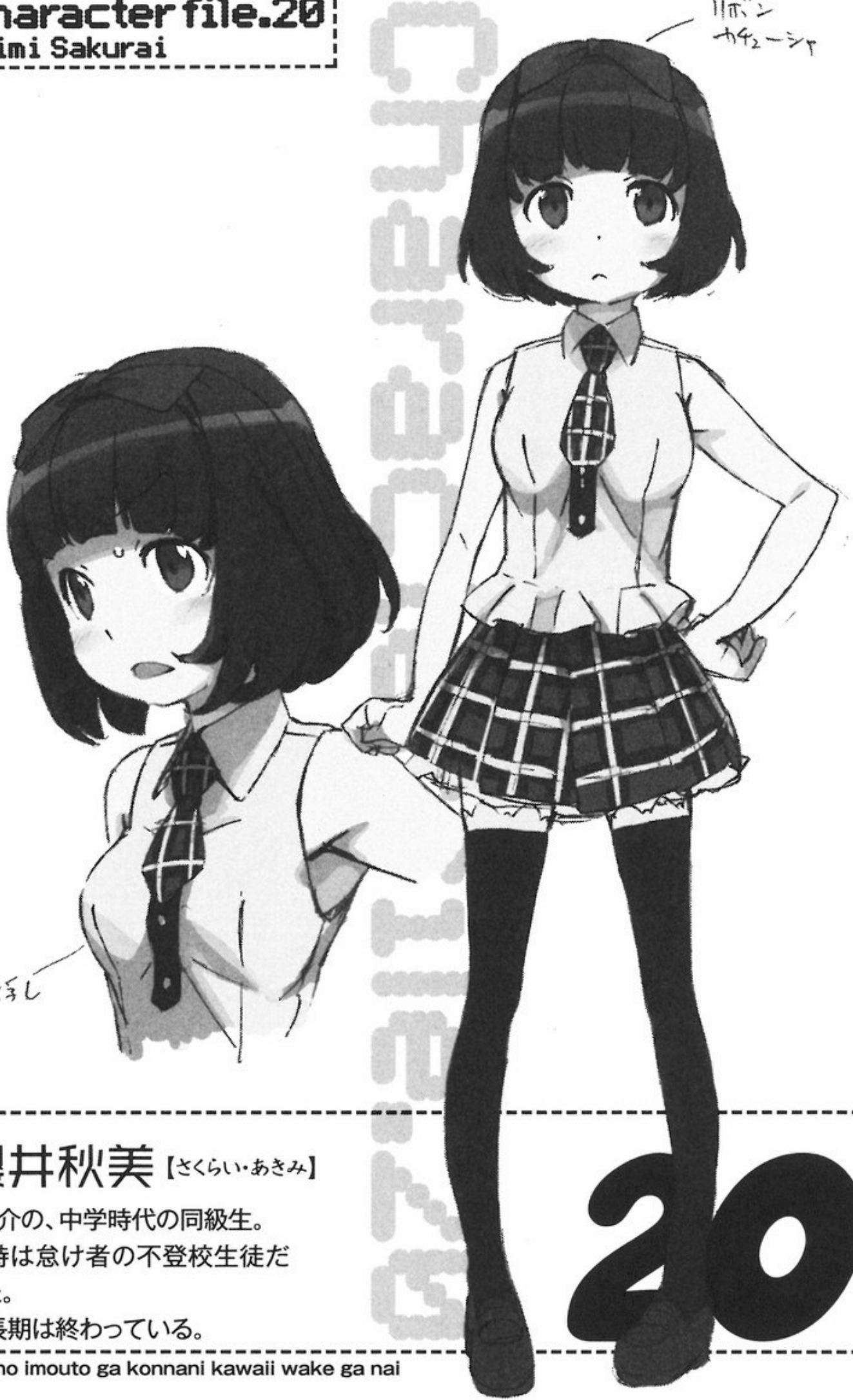
"Don't force yourself, okay?"

"Um."

"You don't have to show off in front of me or Kirino."

"Um."

# Character file.20
Akimi Sakurai




## 櫻井秋美【さくらい・あきみ】

◆京介の、中学時代の同級生。
当時は怠け者の不登校生徒だった。
成長期は終わっている。

20

"When you feel pain, please cry."

"…Aaghr…Oh… Aagrhhhh… Ahhhhhhhhhh."

I finally broke into tears.

I cried in my childhood friend's arms.

…Ah… my characteristic… can't be help.

# Chapter 4


第四章

The scene returned to the Tamura's household, second floor.

I kept telling Kirino and Manami my old story.

"— Because of that, I stopped trying hard."

I gave up. Even now, I still had given up.

"What does my miserable story have to do with 'this talk'?"

"Don't you get it? I told you everything is related!"

"Hey, for real?"

"Yeah."

Kirino looked at Manami:

"So that is what happened? Manami?"

"Yes, that's right."

Manami slightly nodded, lightly blushing.

"But… just now… Kyou-chan described me a little too much…"

"Hm, really? I didn't try to though."

"About that…" Kirino seemed to want to say something, but changing her mind she just said, "Ah, forget it."

"Hey, what do you mean?"

Kirino showed a blank expression and continued:

"I just think that… in some way… I — unknowingly received Manami's help…"

"Ah! Why?"

Seeing Manami's surprised expression, Kirino grinned:

"Heehee, I won't tell you — but yes, three years ago Kyousuke was saved by Manami's convincing."

Why do you look like you're about to say 'I can understand your feelings back then'?

Did the me from three years ago have something in common with what Kirino knew?

Forget it. There is something more important thing going on here.

"So — I will ask you again. What does my miserable story have to do with 'this talk'?"

"……"

Kirino took a deep breath…

It seemed like... this was a very important topic for her.

She said:

"I told you already. At that time, 'the brocon me' saw that 'onii-chan who always tried his hardest' as very cool. He was intelligent, fast, always tried harder than anyone else — he was special to me. My dream was to become like that."

"……"

So that's why.

"— But he didn't really exist."

"…Kirino."

"I understand that now. But the me back then — didn't."

Tears welled up in my little sister's eyes. She was forcing herself to speak.

"…Back then, I hated my 'aniki' who had given up, who never showed off in front of me again. Back then, I hated it. I hated it so much. 'My favorite aniki' became lazy, even his grades dropped… And yet he casually laughed it off. I couldn't believe it."

Ah… ah… there is nothing I could say back to defend myself.

Filled with strong emotions, Kirino's words continued:

"I tried my best to catch up with 'aniki' — but you become so lazy! So I hated you…I wanted to vomit… I couldn't forgive you…"

"That is why, I began to hate you."

Because of Manami, I had given up.

Because of that, 'the brave aniki' of her dreams shattered in Kirino's eyes.

That was 'the truth behind the Cold War' between us brother and sister.

"…Rea… lly?"

"'Ah? So disgusting… can you stop using my line?'"

Kirino was mimicking my line back then. But that sounded like a curse coming from her.

"…I'm a useless aniki. I'm sorry."

I was about to cry. But I forced all of my feelings inside into that single sentence.

Kirino shook her head.

"I will never forgive you. So please, don't forgive me."

"Kirino-chan."

Manami opened her month and tried to say something. But Kirino stared back:

"Actually, Manami wanted me and Kyousuke to make up, didn't you? Making up with me was just an excuse."

"_____"

Manami widened her eyes in surprise.

…Is that true? So Manami asked for that talk… so Kirino and I could make up?

Kirino showed Manami a faint smile:

"Thank you. But that won't do. Because until now, Kyousuke didn't live up to my expectations — and I'm still waiting for that aniki. If he is a terrible aniki, then I am a terrible imouto. So I guess that we can't just forgive each other so easily."

"Even now, after you have solved this misunderstanding? You still can't make up?"

Faced with Manami's question, Kirino answered with a pained expression.

"As brother and sister, we had misunderstood each other since five years ago… And three years ago, because of that event; we entered a cold war. We didn't acknowledge each other. We rarely spoke with each other. Even though we were brother and sister, and lived under the same roof."

She took a deep breath and concluded:

"All of those years…we can't just pretend they never existed."

"…I see. Kirino-chan is so serious."

Manami smiled lightly.

"Manami… are you taking me for a fool?"

"Yes."

Ah? Shocked, I turned to Manami. With a blank expression, she said:

"Recently, I had something I really wanted to tell Kirino. So I will say it today — are you an idiot?"

"That…"

Even Kirino paused.

"H-hey!"

"Um? What's wrong, Kyou-chan?"

Manami kept smiling lightly while Kirino remained motionless.

I felt a chill in my spine — so I slowly asked:

"Ta… Tamura… Manami-sama… are you… angry now?"

"I'm very angry right now."

I knew it! Just like three years ago in that classroom!

Manami thrust her finger at Kirino's face:

"Why do you have to overthink it, Kirino? You want to make up with your aniki, don't you?"

"L-like I said. The time when we didn't get along—"

"Just pretend it never happened — what can you do about it now?"

Manami spoke in a calm tone. Just like when she spoke to me in the past.

"How long are you going to worry about something that's irreversible?"

"However long I like! So — what exactly are you trying to say?"

Kirino recovered and shot back, she didn't bother hiding her displeasure and stared at Manami.

Manami faced that stare and smiled, nodding:

"You two. Please hurry to make up and become normal brother and sister."

It didn't matter if you were angry or not.

Didn't care about other's thought — that was Manami like when she lectured someone.

"…Ah… I'm angry…"

She scratched her head.

"Kyou-chan."

I faced Manami. I have no intention of hiding.

"I want to improve my relationship with Kirino. After she went abroad and returned, many things have happened — so I hope. Kirino."

"What?"

"Can you — make up with me?"

"That…"

With a troubled look Kirino lowered her gaze.

Then looked up again.

"Say, what exactly kind of 'make up' do you mean? You and I don't ignore each other anymore and talk to each other like normal?"

If that was the case, then we already had made up.

"Isn't that right? Isn't that the same as now? We are 'making up' — aren't we?"

"Yes. But I wonder if we could forgive after five years."

Thanks to tonight's talk, I understood the reason we had drifted apart.

I had long forgiven Kirino.

"— You are right, it couldn't be done now. Because I hadn't made the effort to forgive."

"…I also didn't plan to forgive."

Forgive ourselves.

Although we had a change of heart, we still needed more time.

Sorry Manami. We aren't going to make up just yet.

"— I see… Then it can't be helped."

Manami looked like she had seen through our reason.

"Yes. However."

I smiled and said some important words to Manami.

"Because of 'that talk' — our misunderstanding has disappeared. Thank you very much."

"You are welcome — ahaha."

"I see. I rarely see you laugh like that."

"Sorry, because it is strange. I think that you two could make up if you talked about it —"

"It can't be helped?"

"Not exactly. But it's better not to say it."

"_____"

Both Kirino and I blushed.

"Ahaha, Kyou-chan, how about 'Ara ara, sorry for making you worry' — is that right?"

"No it's not!"

Don't mimic other people!

"Anyway! Manami! Your relationship with Kirino is bad too, right? Is it true that you planned 'this talk' just to make me and Kirino make up — that making up with Kirino was just an excuse?"

Kirino firmly believed that, but I didn't.

"Of course not. I truly wanted to make up with Kirino."

"I, I see."

Kirino looked surprised.

Hey, how cold-hearted do you think Manami is?

Manami slightly smiled with Kirino:

"So. Can I continue to 'make up with Kirino'?"

"— Whatever. The end result is the same."

Kirino looked away and brushed her hair.

She changed so much, just like she said 'prepared to face a final boss.'

"It's rare to have a chance to talk like this, so how about we keep going?"

"To get to an end, huh."

Kirino sounded weak. She said:

"Even so, I don't want to talk about such a long topic."

"Ah? Really?"

"Yes. Because the reason I don't get along with Manami, was what you said just now."

"…How does my old story have anything to do with you two —"

"There was something else after that. Three years ago, you gave up, stopped trying and turned into 'ah ah this can't be helped' — I once went looking for Manami, thinking 'It must be Tamura's fault.'"

"Ah… I see. So you had a talk with her too."

"Yes. I'm going to take this chance and make it clear then… February of this year, when Manami came to our house, although I asked 'who are you' — I actually still remembered."

"Really. I didn't remember what happened between me and Kirino."

"Hey! Are you trying to pick a fight or what?"

"I'm not. Sorry, it had just been so long."

Seems like Manami forgot something related to Kirino.

They used to get along so well, but now they totally don't.

"Still, February of this year — I remember something about Kyou-chan. I found some porn inside Kyou-chan's room…"

Could you please forget about them? That was one of my black histories too.

"After that, I kept thinking about why Kirino hated me so much… then I finally understood. It must have been because of our last meeting three years ago."

That was the incident when Kirino came to Manami's household three years ago. Something happened that made Kirino hate Manami.

"It was a huge shock to me, but it seems like it's not to you Manami. You had forgotten about it."

"Sorry."

Manami only apologized.

"You forgot about it so easily, you paid me no attention — and you said you want to make up with me?"

"Of course. I have heard so many things about Kirino from Kyou-chan and Ayase-chan, so I wanted to meet Kirino-chan… Although I knew that you hated me, I wanted to make up with 'the current Kirino.'"

"…Hmph."

Kirino folded her arms and narrowed her eyes.

While Manami smiled slightly.

Both of them continued their talk, face to face.

— I shouldn't interrupt them…

"Three years ago, when I screamed 'give me back my aniki,' you said —"

— The 'awesome aniki' Kirino admired never existed to begin with.

"— Like that."

"Yes."

"At that time, I was angry. Very very angry. I thought 'how could it happen. You must have done something' — I was so miserable back then."

"Kirino-chan was just a child back then. Isn't that normal?"

"Your attitude always was like an adult — it pissed me off so much — back then, I felt that way."

"……"

Kirino and Manami didn't say anything — then Kirino did something unexpected. She suddenly bowed.

"I'm sorry. I was a non-sensible kid back then."

"I forgive you. Actually… I couldn't say anything to you."

"Thank you very much."

"It's fine. I don't mind."

Manami smiled and replied. Kirino looked up, her temple twitching.

"Ah ah, by the way — are you still angry?"

"I'm still angry."

"Not because of three years ago?"

"No, because of something right now."

"I see. Looks like we need to be honest with other."

"Yes. We would never make up."

— Can you two pay attention to me? What should I do?

Sparks flying when their eyes met, Kirino glanced at me and slowly said:

"After three years, I once again received help from aniki many times — sometimes we had small talks with each other. I finally understood what Manami meant back then. My aniki is not an invincible superhero. He can only do normal things. He is a normal student. He felt happy when he got a girlfriend. He felt lost and frustrated when he was dumped. He got angry when someone played with him. He cried when he was hurt — just like me, he is a normal human being."

"…Kirino."

What is going on… Damn… what the hell is going on.

Now… I really… want to apologize to my little sister.

But that would upset her, so I stopped myself.

I'm sorry. I'm not a good aniki.

I'm sorry. I can't become your invincible superhero.

I'm sorry for being a normal guy.

"My 'aniki' who loved to take care of others was actually just forcing himself, showing off, risking everything."

Something so simple, yet back then I couldn't understand —

Kirino gritted her teeth and looked down.

Then she looked up at Manami.

"So now, I will say this for three years ago — Manami, thank you for taking care of aniki."

"You are welcome."

That was the first time they smiled with each other.

It would be the first time in three years — no, five years that we finally closed our gap.

"Say, Manami, can we make up?"

"Of course, Kirino-chan. Have you told me everything you wanted to?"

"No, I still have something to say."

"I see. I also have something to say."

"I'm going first. That was the reason Manami was angry right?"

"Yeah —"

Then Manami looked at me. Kirino's eyes also looked at me.

— Me?

Manami's smile disappeared.

"Kirino, recently, don't you think Kyou-chan is slowly returning to his old self?"

"_____"

My eyes widened, because I realized.

Kirino smiled wryly.

"I knew it. I think so too."

"The current Kirino-chan probably understands what I want to say right?"

"Yes — I fully understand."

Manami and Kirino nodded.

"Because of Kirino and Kuroneko and Ayase's 'life counseling' — Kyou-chan had forced himself, showed off, and risked himself. At first it was only Kirino with a simple reason, but now it has turned into this."

I… for Kirino, Kuroneko, Ayase, Kanako…… I……

Considering what happened, after Manami saved me, and gave me life counseling.

It totally wasn't my style — recently, 'me from before' had slowly merged into 'Kousaka Kyousuke's life.'

No wonder Manami was angry.

"If something like Sakurai's incident happened again and you said 'just leave it to me' and went to play the role of 'the invincible superhero,' everyone would be worried."

Manami showed an 'I-am-very-angry' smile:

"I thought you had fixed your bad habit, but somehow it has returned."

"Yeah, seems so."

I had no choice but to respond honestly.

Manami looked as if all the strength just left her body.

"— Such a light answer? I'm very, very angry."

"Ack… I understand though."

This must be how men feel when they entered Pachinko — unable to hold themselves back.[4]

I could understand why she got angry. Even I myself think that 'this shouldn't be.'

"Ah — I can't seem to totally get rid of it. I'm very sorry, Manami."

"Um…"

Manami smiled wryly.

"…It's going to be difficult."

"You… you… really… Now I want to help Manami too…"

Even Kirino was shocked because of my confession. She continued:

"Well, this can't be helped. He is an aniki after all. Well Manami — good luck."

"Oh, suddenly you feel so dependable."

"Right, right."

Kirino made a 'step aside' gesture, and then she suddenly became serious:

"I understand what Manami is worried about, but I have something to say first."

"Okay, what is that Kirino?"

"The current aniki is not going to turn back to the 'aniki from before.'"

Hearing that, Manami smiled enthusiastically, and asked:

"What is so different?"

"Now, aniki will not try to take care of everything all by himself, saying 'just leave it to me.' Aniki now knows that he's a normal, ordinary student, even still he accepts his own little sister's attitude."

"Really, ah… this can't be helped."

"Kirino, just leave it to me."

Kirino grinned while mimicking me.

— Idiot. That's not like me at all. I'm not that cool.

Still looking at Manami, Kirino pointed at me:

"Isn't it gross?"

"Yeah… somewhat… gross."

Manami couldn't help but laugh:

"Hey, you two!"

I think it's forgivable for me to get angry now.

We are having a serious conversation! Why are you two suddenly making fun of me?

They kept laughing at me for a while, until —



"— I see. In that case, I can rest assured."

Manami took a deep breath and said:

"Kyou-chan is not going to turn back into the Kyou-chan from before… right?"

"Of course. You are my childhood friend, you should know that better than anyone."

"Ha… I see… You are quicker to give up than before, and you can get angry too… Although I don't know if that counts as growing up."

To tell the truth, before, I was more decisive, more confident, more enthusiastic — I honestly think that it was more than the current me. But I also have more good points.

That is the truth. No one knows which one is better.

"'The past me' and 'the current me' are two different people. But both of them are me. That doesn't mean 'he' had disappeared."

That is why even now, I will continue saying 'just leave it to me.' Even if I had many painful memories because of that.

"You are right."

A person will keep changing. Everyone will.

During this process, you have to leave something behind. Sometimes it could be something you once considered very important.

"That is all I wanted to say to Manami."

"I have also said everything I wanted to say to Kirino-chan."

"Which do you prefer, the current aniki or the old one?"

"The current one is more reassuring. Although sometimes he makes me worry too — what about you Kirino-chan?"

"My ideal aniki never existed. Now, I — just have this guy."

"I see. About that, Kirino-chan."

"What is it, Manami?"

"We have to properly celebrate this."

"Totally agree!"

Manami smiled slightly while Kirino showed an unsatisfied smile. Both of them refused to back off.

That was the result of our talk this night.

Those two who originally distanced themselves from each other had agreed to 'properly celebrate.'

I couldn't help but reminisce.

With this, we estranged siblings took another step forward.

How will it end?

Anyway, did Manami and Kirino make up or not?

I understood immediately from just a glance, so I sighed.

"Really, ah… this can't be helped."

In life, every good time always comes with a mountain of regret.

And the three of us are still in our most brilliant time.

The next morning, when I woke up, I saw my childhood friend secretly looking at me.

"Ah, sorry, did I wake you?"

"No… what time is it now?"

"Just a little past five. Kyou-chan should keep sleeping ~"

"…What about you?"

"I am going to help prepare breakfast."

"Waking up so early every day, you are such a hard worker."

"It is just my habit."

Although Manami didn't notice, I think she is so strong.

We went to sleep very late last night.

After our talk ended… it was about two o'clock. I slept in the same room with Manami and Kirino. Of course they clearly distanced themselves from me, but it had been so long since I slept here. It felt so nostalgic.

"Um? Where is Kirino?"

I glanced around, only to find out that Kirino was gone.

"She is changing in my room, after that she plans to do a little jogging."

"…Another girl who is too energetic in the morning…"

"Ahaha…"

"Um… then I should get up too… Hiya…"

Because I got up too quickly, our faces drew closer. Manami quickly retreated back.

She recovered from her position and placed her hands on her thighs.

"But isn't it too early?"

"Yeah. But after our talk yesterday — I can no longer accept losing."

"……"

Manami was shocked — after she realized what I meant, she showed a worried expression.

"…Kyou-chan, what are you thinking?"

"You saw through me."

"Of course… because right now — you look like Kyou-chan from before when you were about to show off."

"I see."

I smiled. But Manami kept staring at me. I could understand her reason.

So I took a deep breath, closed my eyes, reopened them and said:

"I plan to visit Sakurai."

"Why?"

"Because I haven't apologized to her."

"…Even if you apologize now, it might just cause her more trouble."

"You are right. This is to satisfy myself. I'm not doing it 'for someone else.'"

"Even in that case, how are you going to meet Sakurai-san? She changed her phone number and address; finding them is going to take a long time."

I firmly believed that with enough motivation, I could find as many ways as I wanted.

"…You are so stubborn."

Manami shook her head.

"— You should know that better than anyone else."

Someone interrupted Manami and me. Only Kirino would call Manami 'you'[5]…Since when did she…

Kirino was wearing sportswear which allowed easy movement. Her arms folded across her chest.

Still… not 'Tamura-chan' nor 'Manami-onee-san.' Just 'you'… that much showed me that both of them had a change in their relationship.

"When he is like that, he won't listen to anything we say. So just leave him be."

"— I understand."

Manami smiled wryly.

"Even if he was worried about Sakurai-san, he wouldn't admit it, right?"

"Didn't he become that way because of Manami?"

"He was originally like that."

You two didn't bother hiding huh. I'm standing right here, you know?

Suddenly, Kirino turned to me.

With a serious tone, she said,

"From your story, I think that what you are about to do will be very difficult — you really have no intention of giving up?"

"Thank you for your advice. But I have made up my mind."

"I see."

Raising her chest, Kirino scratched the back of her head and said:

"Really, ah… this can't be helped."

She sighed and walked to me.

Then she shoved something into my chest.

"How about using this?"

"…This is… my cell phone? What are you going to do?"

"Just like you said, 'granny's bag of wisdom.'"

That's what Kirino's aniki usually said.

And so —

I finally managed to meet with Sakurai again in this game.

I listened to my little sister and tried using that 'Imouto-City' game.

"That Sakurai played 'Imouto-City' too right? Why not search for her in this game? Maybe we could find a hint. Well, there is no telling if she still plays or not."

"Oh, well it's worth a try."

I used my cell phone to access the 'Imouto-City' player list and easily found 'Sakurai Akimi.'

"If you are going to sign up, be sure to add my name as your reference in Siscalypse too. I could get a rare card from the operator company that way."

"I don't know what you're saying, but — just let me do this first!"

Still… I was worried.

In the past, her parents cut off all contact and had her transferred away, without leaving behind any means to contact her — at that time, I had no choice but to give up.

But now, thanks to SNS, I could easily contact her again.

Even for someone as slow with technology as me, I still found this very fast and convenient, almost like cheating. Just like a secret item that allows me to do anything like in anime.

If you haven't tried it and think I am lying, go ahead. Find a big random SNS group and check for your old friends and classmates.

You will definitely feel the same as I do now.

"It has been a long time. I was your classmate in middle school, Kousaka Kyousuke. Do you remember me?"

"Ah yes! It has been a long time! Of course I remember you! Hey, can we meet up now?"

I got a reply in less than a minute. What an insane reply speed. What exactly are you doing at the moment?

Still — that style, without a doubt it was Sakurai.

Both of our messages contained our excitement.

We agreed to meet at the game center near the bus station.

That was where we first met. I'm now standing near a table next to the Siscalypse area. She was sitting on the other side. After three years, she didn't seem to have changed much.

"Long time no see, Kousaka."

"_____"

I almost broke into tears, but I managed to hold them back.

"Long time no see, Sakurai."

I felt like time had turned back three years.

Amidst the chaos, I slowly sat down in front of Sakurai.

"Ha… you still wear those weird clothes."

"But you seem totally different from before."

"Every one of my middle school friends says that when they meet me."

I didn't let it affect me. After all, I just properly faced myself.

Anyway, Sakurai, you haven't changed one bit. You don't even look any older.

Despite her unchanged appearance — she gave the impression that something had changed.

Maybe that was because I'm older now.

We should both be high school students now, but I still felt like facing one of my female kouhai. In Kirino's words, she changed from an 'onee-chan type' into an 'imouto type.'

"Sorry for calling you here so suddenly."

"What are you saying?! If not for you, we would still be unable to meet! — Thank you. Still, about that time —"

"Sorry."

"I'm so sorry."

We both bowed at the same time. Our heads almost hit the table.

That was the first time I heard such a heavy 'I'm so sorry.'

I thought that I should be the one to apologize. I never thought that she was thinking the same.

"To tell the truth — I didn't know how to reach when you that happened. I have a lot to apologize to you for…"

"Me too."

"…Then can I go first?"

"Yes."

I nodded. Sakurai nodded back.

"Then I will be blunt. I don't want to use an excuse, so — I'm sorry for not contacting you until now. Sorry that I got injured. It was my fault, but you are the one who took the blame. I never told you my feelings — I'm so sorry."

"I forgive you for everything."

"Thank you."

"It's fine. I don't mind."

Like Manami said, decisive is good.

"— At least, now I don't mind."

Adding such useless additional lines and the inability to lie at times like these was a bad habit of mine.

"I see…"

Sakurai nodded.

"So, it's my turn, okay?"

"Okay."

"I brought you to somewhere dangerous and caused that injury. I'm sorry I didn't try to contact you until now. I'm sorry for breaking my promises."

Sakurai closed her eyes and accepted my apology. She reopened them and smiled:

"…Haha… although I feel that your apology was different from mine… I forgive you no matter what."

"Thank you."

"Is this really okay?"

"…Sakurai."

"Back then… I was injured and brought to the hospital. Mom transferred me away without asking for my opinion — I knew nothing about it — when I recovered, it was too late. I could have done something, even a late apology… but I didn't. Because I wasn't as brave as you. And time

passed… until now. You took the initiative and set up this meeting… I still wonder if this is a dream."

"…Sorry for taking so long… I should have found you sooner."

No matter what method I used. Maybe it would have been difficult, but there were several ways I could have tried. But I didn't. Because I lacked the courage.

The 'talk' between Kirino and Manami had become a chance for me to resolve the hidden trouble sealed deep down in my heart.

I received the courage I needed from them… Really… I'm so thankful to them.

"…So… how are you doing?"

"I'm going to school. I have a lot of friends — everything is fine."

"So you no longer say 'I don't wanna go to school'?"

"Nope, no more."

But sometimes I still play games — that was what Sakurai said. She even showed me a picture of 'Imouto-City.'

Haha, I never thought that this game would turn into a key for us to meet again.

"Now, I'm — 'a normal high school girl.'"

"I see. That's good to hear."

I felt relieved.

I reckon — there was someone who could do things that I couldn't.

And Sakurai was one such person.

"Ah, Kousaka. Maybe it's too late, but can I finish what I was about to say back then?"

"I want to hear too. Back then — what were you going to say?"

"Um —"

Sakurai looked off into the distance. Maybe she was remembering the beautiful scene she saw at the top of the mountain three years ago. I recalled that time too.

In a corner of the noisy game center, this place turned into the top of a mountain. Our hearts were calm; we enjoyed the wind and the green-filled scene.

"I… will say it."

Just like three years ago, she turned to me:

"So beautiful! I'm so moved! So beautiful! Thank you so much! Thank you so much for everything!"

"Sakurai Akimi! Likes Kousaka Kyousuke the mostttttttttttt ———!!!"

"…Ha… ha… ha…"

She shouted — and gasped for air.

Out of breath and sweating, Sakurai smiled:

"Heehee, are you surprised?"

"I am very surprised!"

If I had heard those words back then, the first confession I received would not be from Kuroneko but from Sakurai.

…Back then, I would have been very happy.

To see that my efforts had paid off —

I was prepared to hear that my efforts caused trouble for her, but I was still happy.

In fact, I always wanted someone to acknowledge my efforts.

Even now… that hasn't changed.

It would be more accurate to say that 'the current me' has a strong awareness of my inferiority, thus making me feel truly happy.

"You… kuh…you… I'm so happy that I want to cry."

I was already crying. Damn… damn… recently why do I cry so easily…?

"— Did you know that back then, you asked me a stupid question?"

"…I know. Back then, I was an idiot."

My tears kept flowing, making it harder to see Sakurai.

"Even after all this time, I'm glad I told you. My feelings are still the same. ... It's a selfish request, but can I hear your answer?"

"Yeah…"

I nodded. But just like a child, I couldn't stop my tears, so I was unable to answer immediately. I felt nauseous. But it couldn't be helped, right?

Ha… I regained my breath, wiped my tears… but they didn't stop…

"No matter whether it's now or three years ago, my answer is the same."

I answered while crying.

"Sorry, I already have someone I like."

"I planned to confess to her this time.

"…Yes, I know."

Sakurai accepted my answer.

"Thank you… for rejecting me so clearly."

My tears kept flowing.

And so.

The story from three years ago between me and Sakurai finally came to an end.

On the other hand… my story with Kirino continues.

If I had to give it a title, um……

Let's call it 'My little sister can't be this cute' — what do you guys think?

# Epilogue



# エピローグ

My name is Tamura Manami. It's strange to say this, but I'm just an ordinary high school girl. I haven't joined any clubs and my sole hobby is cooking.

So…

Why am I introducing myself?

Because I want to tell you something that Kyou-chan didn't know.

It is something that only I can tell you now.

That's right —

I want to tell you about another part of the story.

『When Kyou-chan is living alone.』

『Before I have 'a talk' with Kirino.』

『Before Ayase confesses to Kyou-chan.』

It happened after the mock exam ended, during a month when we were waiting for the results.

Of course the exam was important for Kyou-chan, but it's important for me too. One day in November:

Kanako came to my home.

"Hello, sensei."

"Hello, Kanako-chan."

Not long ago, by Ayase's introduction, I became Kanako's teacher in housework.



Meeting me at the entrance, Kanako's eyes widened:

"Wow! You look so mature sensei! What happened?"

"Ah?"

"I mean your hair style! Hair style!"

Kanako pointed at my hair. My hand brushed through my light-colored hair.

"Ah… um… what do you think?"

"Too bad sensei!!"

Recently, kids used the words 'too bad' to express their opinions, which sometimes made me unable to understand what they are saying.

"Ah? Still, why do you suddenly want long hair? To motivate yourself?"

"No, it's not ~! This is a 'wig.' Ayase-chan asked a salon to help me with this."

"Ah ~"

The truth is, before Ayase helped me to 'change my image,' my previous 'changing my image combat' ended in total failure.

—— Kyou-chan totally didn't notice.

So I learned from my previous defeat and lengthened my hair — 'changing my image second combat.'

If this continued, no matter how dense ~~~~~ my childhood friend is he would surely understand my feelings!

"Such major changes to my hairstyle… That was the first time I tried it… So embarrassing"

"No problem, it's good. Much better than before!"

"Ahaha… Thank you, Kanako-chan."

"Alright! Next is changing your clothing style —"

Kanako is the brutally honest type and it can be hard to deal with her.

Um… It doesn't sound bad to improve my confidence.

When I showed this to my family, everyone told me that it was beautiful, especially my younger brother. "Wow! So beautiful! Onee-chan! Can I have one too? I'll become cool just by having it!"

Really, family members are always nice toward their own child.

Kanako said in a high tone:

"In other words, sensei, you have finally decided to conquer Kyousuke!"

"What… What do you mean 'conquer'…?"

Just like what you see — Kanako and I had become such close friends that we would discuss everything.

I still think that Kanako-chan was interested in Kyou-chan…

Recently, I can't figure out what is going on in her head.

Seeing that I didn't reply, Kanako asked in confusion:

"Um? Am I wrong?"

"— Not exactly."

"Ah ~"

"But I'm not going to act immediately — come in."

"Sorry for intruding ~ today are we going to make potato stew?"

"Um. But before that, I will teach you how to make tea."

"Al~right"

Kanako removed her shoes and bluntly asked me:

"By the way, why? Why didn't you tell him?"

This child… She could ask something so important so naturally.

I quietly answered:

"…I… It's not like I don't want to go out with Kyou-chan. No, of course I want to go out with him, but I have something more important to do."

"What is that?"

"Making Kyou-chan happy."

I smiled and answered.

That is my true feeling.

"……"

Kanako didn't reply. She seemed to be thinking.

When we put on our aprons, she finally asked me.

Just when I was about to teach her how to make tea:

"Sensei, are you okay with Kyousuke going out with other girls?"

"To tell you the truth, I'm not."

I unconsciously answered her question with my true thoughts. Because of that, the atmosphere suddenly tensed.

"Because Kyou-chan is as important to me as a family member, so I hope he could be together with a girl he truly loves."

"Oh oh oh just like a granny — it sounds like something from a stubborn person refusing to admit defeat no matter what — but it's not like that right. Sensei, you don't look like you have given up."

"If Kyou-chan meets someone he likes and goes out with her, I will give up and pray for his happiness. Still, look at Kuroneko — he can't treat her as a family member or childhood friend. If he goes out with others…"

"What if he does?"

She kept asking. I returned a half-hearted smile ——

"Then I will be very unhappy."

—— and I ended it with something totally not funny.

"Maybe Kirino-chan thinks the same too… So I decided to change… If Kyou-chan sees me as… someone he loves…"

So embarrassing! I can't finish my sentence.

"Wait a second! Sensei! The tea is boiling! The water is escaping!"

"Wow! Wa wa wa!"

I quickly wiped the water on the tea tray.

"Phew… so dangerous."

Then Kanako immediately went back to the topic. Looks like it made her interested.

"'Decided to change' — in other words, so you won't regret it later?"

"Actually, in that case, I will properly regret it."

Kanako laughed:

"Hahaha! So what is the difference?!"

"Maybe Kanako-chan will be angry when hearing this… but I'm just a normal girl. No matter how hard I try, there are many things that won't end how I want them to. So if I regret it later, I want to at least properly regret it."

"Um… so, you have decided 'to go all out' right? Although I'm not very sure."

"Yes, like that —"

I felt like I had summarized my own thoughts… ah that's fine.

"Isn't that great! As expected of sensei — still, why don't you confess to him right now? What if someone steals him?"

"Like Kanako-chan?"

"Ehehe ~"

Looks like I was right. She blushed.

"I feel that in Kyou-chan's current condition, he will reject anyone who confesses to him."

"Because Kirino hates it? From what Ayase and sensei said, and from what Kirino said, plus my own explanation — how should I put it, it is too troublesome."

Ah, so she had spoken with Kirino. Her honest personality is good… Kanako-chan is amazing.

"The brocon is disgusting and the siscon is horrible. They've caused so many problems for others, but they can shrug it off with a 'so what'? However, that denpa stray cat seemed to have done something unnecessary.

It's Kuroneko, Kanako-chan.

"If it was me, I would pretend that I didn't know anything and go out with him. About Kyousuke and his little sister's feeling, I don't care. So annoying."

"Um… Kanako-chan, are you Kirino's friend?"

"Of course! 100% good friend!"

……Really?

"Because I'm her friend, I don't have to hold back"

— Amazing. So you could think it that way too.

Kanako-chan didn't take my reaction seriously, she laughed and kept talking.

"Just let Kirino endure it for the rest of her life. Why should I care about someone who couldn't speak her feelings?"

So blunt! Her bad side is revealed for everyone to see.

"In my opinion, the one called stray cat is also an idiot."

"Ahaha, then I'm an idiot too."

"Really?"

"Kuroneko clearly likes Kyou-chan and Kirino… so she couldn't ignore Kirino's feelings and focus only on her happiness."

I once said that to Kyou-chan. Now I will say it once more.

"About that, I agreed with Kuroneko. I hope Kyou-chan, Kirino, and everyone else can be happy."

"Ha? We are talking about love! Are you hoping for Kyousuke to make a harem?"

Kanako-chan laughed at me.

I smiled:

"Of course that is not impossible, aside from Kirino who is his little sister."

"Don't you think it's disgusting that she loves her own brother?"

"Yes. This is real life — not an eroge."

I think so… I think that should be common sense to everyone, right?

Still if Kuroneko heard that, she would be upset in Kirino's place.

However, now, Kirino must agree with me.

"_____"

Kanako froze for a second…

Then she laughed:

"It's amazing. Sensei, you are so kind — although you are as mature as an adult, sometimes you act so childish too."

"— Um, that's the truth."

I'm still a lively high school girl.

Sometime I was misunderstood, but I'm not a saint or anything.

Just like Kyou-chan is a normal high school student, I'm also a normal girl.

I can feel angry, jealous —

"Kanako-chan. Even I have my own ulterior motive."

"Haha. How about you tell me?"

She slowly turned to me:

"Haha… No I won't, because Kanako-chan is one of my strong enemies too. Still… I expect Kirino to cry."

"Haha ~ so terrifying. It would be troublesome if Ayase heard that."

"…Won't you be angry, Kanako-chan?"

"Um… maybe I'm gonna cry like Kirino. But in any case, I don't have any right to blame you."

"…Really?"

"To tell the truth, I'm not sure. If Kirino does cry because of that, maybe I would get angry. Even if it's unreasonable, sometimes people get angry because they feel like it."

"This can't be helped then."

Somehow, despite completely different personalities and characteristics, Kanako-chan got along with me unexpectedly well.

"How about… we have some tea before making potato stew?"

Although in 'that problem' we could be enemies —

I still hope that we could continue being friends forever.

"…It tastes good, right?"

"Yes, I agree."

"Heehee… could it be that Kanako-chan is a genius?"

"Can you do it without me standing next to you?"

"……Ah, you're right —"

I drank tea with Kanako-chan and tasted her newly made potato stew.

"I did try making that at home, but no matter what it wouldn't turn out this way. My big sister got all angry and said 'wow, what a good. I will go buy some cooked food.'"

"Ahaha… so that happened…"

"I will make her look at me differently next time."

"Just keep practicing. Still Kanako-chan, what about studying for the exam?"

"Ack? Ah… that… Hahahaha."

Kanako-chan turned to stone.

"Didn't you say that you want to — go to the same school with Ayase?"

"…Um… I did study. But I'm not sure about the result. I could pass or I could not. If I failed, I could become an idol instead."

"So, do you want to study together after learning housework today?"

"Ah… really?"

"Yes."

I smiled.

Somehow, as long as I smiled with Kanako-chan, she became very obedient.

…It must be because Ayase's horrible smile had deeply traumatized her.

"Say, sensei, what about you? You have your exam too, right?"

"— I'm fine. Because I have the charm that Kanako-chan gave me."

I showed her the charm that I still carry.

To tell you the truth, I'm not a big believer.

But that is not a problem.

Even if there is no god in this world, this charm will protect me.

"Don't worry. Both Kyou-chan and I are okay."

I believe that in life, that exam is more important than love.

Before the exam, there were one or two small incidents, but it shouldn't be a problem.

…Carefully prepare a line of defense — that is my style.

A mortal human — should live a life full of caution.

So even if I didn't say it out loud, Kirino-chan is a very brilliant light.

"Uhm."

I don't know how Kanako-chan understood my answer. But she changed the topic:

"So who is taking care of Kyousuke at the moment? The agreement between Ayase and him only lasted until the exam was over, right? When I asked Ayase, she just said 'It's not me.'"

"Kyou-chan's mother sometimes goes to help, but not every day. But actually I asked Kyou-chan's parents to —"

"Ah? Really? You asked Kyousuke's parents to take care of Kyousuke?"

"Yeah. I said 'there is something between me and him that made me unable to help him, so please take care of Kyousuke' —"

Kyou-chan didn't know about it.

I don't know about Kirino — maybe she already knew.

"But Kirino said she doesn't want me to help Kyou-chan… so I asked Ayase."

"And now Ayase is like that — so his parents are now taking care of him… What is that called… eh… ack!"

"Meal?"

"Yes, yes! Meal! Their son is living alone — Kyousuke's parents are probably thinking that it would be great if sensei became his girlfriend."

"Ahaha… Who knows? Unless we ask Kyou-chan's parents directly, we have no way to know."

"Still, I'm sure that Ayase likes Kyousuke."

The topic is getting hotter.

"What a huge problem. We have to consider Kirino. I think that everyone should be friends and stop worrying too much."

"That problem should be solved in the near future."

"Ah?"

"I think Kirino understood what I meant before. So if we have a proper talk now… Maybe she could help me with something…"

"Help you with what?"

"Help me to make everyone happy."

I closed my eyes, reopened them and smiled, declaring my intention:

"Don't worry, Kanako-chan. Before I graduate… before Kirino leaves ——"

"I will definitely turn them back into 'a normal pair of siblings.'

To me, that was a task that I had taken three years ago.

I almost forgot about it though.

"With that — everyone would be free to compete without worrying about Kirino. Kanako-chan, can you pass my words to Ayase? Tell her that even if she confesses to Kyou-chan now, she won't succeed."

"No problem!"

Kanako-chan immediately agreed.

"I will tell her 'I'm going to confess to Kyousuke, what are you going to do about it?'"

"…Kanako-chan, are you listening to me?"

"Right right! You are going to think of some way to solve this mess right? In that case, I have to do something too. Isn't that right?"

She grinned and pointed at her herself.

"The one who will lead Kirino back onto the right path is me!"

Ah…really, I can't get in her way…

I'm truly a normal girl.

Sometimes, the story goes in a direction that I'd never expect.

— Winter had arrived.

Before graduation, I have to do something.

The night that we had 'our talk' —

There was something that Kirino and I couldn't say in front of Kyou-chan.

It's more accurate to say this was something unspeakable.

— Three years ago — The reason that destroyed my relationship with Kirino.

I see… However, Kirino-chan.

Don't you think it's strange to love your onii-san?

I think it's not only strange. It's weird. Some will think that it's gross, disgusting.

Siblings can't get married. Your parents will surely oppose it.

The truer Kirino's feelings are, if you grow up without changing them, the more misfortune it will bring for someone.

This is unavoidable. No one, not even Kyou-chan, can change it.

Not the current Kyou-chan — not the same Kyou-chan that Kirino loves.

Because, Kirino's ideal 'amazing onii-san' didn't exist.

That's why, Kirino.

You mustn't tell those feelings to anyone.

Hurry up and forget them, and make up with your real onii-san.

Please come back — and become a normal pair of siblings.

# Vol 12 Prologue

ore no
imouto ga
konnani
kawaii
wake ga
nai⑫

# 俺の妹がこんなに可愛いわけがない⑫

## プロローグ



Last year, during the summer, our story began with an eroge. Now, it's coming to an end soon.

During the free month after the mock exam —

One day in November.

I — Gokou Ruri was called to Akihabara's coffee shop 'Pretty Garden' by Kirino. As usual, I was wearing my 'Nightmare Queen' clothes.

*Clank Clank*

Following the door bell, Saori entered the shop.

Unusually, there were no guests aside from us today. Also, no maids came to disturb us.

"— What is going on?"

Having a bad feeling, I immediately asked. Saori seemed puzzled.

"Looks like Kiririn-shi booked the entire shop. I was told to come here like usual — gozaru."

"— Ah."

"I thought that she invited us to play in Akihabara together… but it seems like I was wrong."

Saori said she wanted to show us her true face once more.

Maybe she was feeling uneasy too.

……

"Sorry to keep you waiting."

The one who broke the silence was our friend.

"Sorry sorry ~ I have my reasons. When I saw a new designer on the way, my feet stopped moving —"

Every one of her movements caused a small clink and clank due to her various accessories — that was my arch nemesis, light angel, Kirino.

She sat down at our table and said:

"Kirara, I want three imouto sodas!"

"What is with you two? What is with this silence?"

"— Say."

She still sucked at reading other people's moods, just like when we first met.

Saori sighed and answered in my place.

"What's so important that you have to ask us to come here to talk?"

"Ah ~ so you found out."

Kirino laughed and scratched her cheek. Suddenly, she spoke in a gentle tone.

"— Well, I do have something to tell you. I chose this place because we are all familiar with it."

"— I plan to go abroad after graduation."

She got directly to the point.

But we listeners couldn't accept this so easily.

…How… could you…?

I was so shocked that I was temporarily unable to say anything.

Even though I expected something like this……

Saori recovered before me and asked:

"You… want to practice track and field again?"

Kirino shook her head.

"No… This time it is because of my work as a model. Didn't I tell you? Misaki-san wants me to be her exclusive model… She asked me to move to the headquarters."

"You… do you know why you came back to Japan?"

"— I understand. I can't stand the loneliness abroad. I don't want to — separate myself from you guys."

"…Then why?"

"This time I will come back often. I could see you guys again. I could see — aniki again… I don't want to lie to myself anymore. Thanks to you I finally understand this."

"If you don't want to separate yourself from us… why don't you just stay here?"

I knew she was sad, but I still said it.

Now isn't the time to feel embarrassed.

"I will tell you beforehand… if you aren't here, I will kill myself."

"Hey, why do you have to take it that way? Even if I'm not here, Saori is. And you have friends at school too!"

"Kiririn-shi, are you going to leave me to take care of such a deep friendship alone — gozaru? Kuroneko-shi, say something too!"

"Ah… Haha… Fool… did you think that I could get along with mere humans in a new school?"

"Don't sound so proud of yourself! Ah, what? So you are still alone without friends at a new school?"

"You don't have to say it out loud!"

Scolded Saori.

I tried to defend myself.

"I'm much better compared to my middle school years. Hm hmph… During this year, my conversational skills have greatly improved… Come and praise me!"

"Alright, alright, good, good — introduce us to some of your friends in the future, okay?"

"…Got it. I will get some new friends before graduation."

Before graduation.

Hearing those words, the silent and heavy atmosphere returned.

……

Saori spoke first.

"I — like our current group. I don't want to lose it. Kiririn-shi says she will come back often, but I'm not convinced."

"…You trust me that little, huh…"

How could we not? We've had a bad experience before.

"— So, allow me to set some conditions."

"Conditions?"

"Yes. First, make sure that we can use the internet, Skype, and phone to contact you."

"No problem. Ok, got it. What is the second?"

"Second, we will visit you sometimes, so make sure you have free time."

"Ah? You are planning to fly to abroad too?"

"Yes, just like Kyousuke-shi did. I have no hesitation about abusing the power of money — gozaru."

She laughed and her mouth turned into a ω shape.

"How about it?"

"…Do whatever you want. You have taken care of me so much; I don't mind."

"I see… Then I'm relieved."

Was she embarrassed? Kirino's face reddened a bit.

"Is there a third?"

"Yes. The third — please, when you graduate, think about it one more time. Everyone would feel lonely without Kiririn-shi in Japan."

"I got it."

Kirino and Saori both nodded. Saori sighed:

"Although I still have a lot to say, that was all for now. Next, I leave it to Kuroneko-shi."

"Me?"

"You must have something to say to Kiririn-shi too."

"…Hm… Let me think for a second."

Saori closed her eyes. I understood what she wanted to say.

"How about —"

She opened her eyes and I blinked with Saori.

I nodded with my friend and smiled with her.

"— There is only one thing we should do! Enjoy every day as much as we can!"

Today, all of us were laughing.

That moment would become my most treasured memory.

— It is now winter.

Him, her… and me… Everything was going to change.

There wasn't much time left before graduation.

What could I do?

One day after Kirino had a talk with those two —

One day in November. I — Aragaki Ayase faced the biggest dilemma of my life.

"……"

"……"

"……"

Let me explain.

I was lying face up in my room.

Kuroneko's foot was placed on my stomach.

And Kirino had just entered.

"……What are you guys doing?"

"Ki… Ki… Ki… Ki… Kirino? This, ah, this is —"

"It's not like that!"

Mom! How could you let Kirino in so easily…?!

Or rather, Kirino was too fast. I just called her not too long ago!

Wearing over-the-knee stockings that showed her graceful curves, Kirino pressed her fingers to her forehead.

"…Um… Ah… There are too many things I want to say, so I will start one at a time…"

She thrust her finger at us:

"So are you two going out?"

"We are not, Kirino!"

"Why, why, why do you think this way?"

"Because you two look excited."

"Ku… Kuroneko! Hurry up and solve this misunderstanding! Or I will kill you!"

"I will do that even if you don't ask me."

Kuroneko is as anxious as I was. She made an unnecessarily arrogant posture.

"Kirino… listen to me. We are holding — the sacred and evil 'reincarnation' ceremony."

"You mean you're playing with each other?"

"Does your mind think of nothing but eroge? How could you say something so shameless without any hint of embarrassment?"

"Well, your forbidden relationship is unrelated to me anyway."

"We are not like that! Kirino! Don't make assumptions based on this misunderstanding!"

"Fine, fine, I understand already. So, tell me. Why did Kuroneko call me to meet at Ayase's house?"

"You don't understand it! I'm talking about that right now!"

"Alright, alright Ayase. I understand that you two don't have that kind of relationship. Is that okay?"

"What an perfunctory response!"

I yelled.

I pushed Kuroneko's foot away and hastily stood up.

"Lis… listen to me! Kirino…!"

To resolve that misunderstanding, Kuroneko and I spent the next five minutes explaining.

"…Ha… Hoh… Do you get it now?"

"Um, kind of. You guys don't have that kind of relationship, what I just saw was a 'reincarnation' ceremony. I'm not quite sure myself, but that was some kind of communication between you two… Like that?"

"…Yes, like that."

"Hahaha… That's all you could understand, you mortal girl. By the way, with the previous ceremony, I acknowledge her dark, killing impulse."

"Please speak in Japanese, okay?"

Kirino seemed to have given up.

"Kuro… Kuroneko! She already kind of understands, please don't make it any harder!"

"…I don't intend to do that…"

Kirino sighed "Ha" and repeated her earlier question.

"So? Why did Kuroneko call me? What is going on?"

…We finally talked about it.

I coughed and said:

"There is something that Kuroneko and I need to tell Kirino."

"Me? From you and Kuroneko?"

"Yes."

"You guys are so different, what happened? Did your relationship improve?"

So, we were now back on that topic.

True, it's understandable that Kirino was puzzled because of that. Her good friend (me, right?) now has good relationship with other girls — she surely would feel uneasy!

She must be very concerned about it! Ah… so cute, Kirino ♪

"Okay, Kirino… I will tell you about it."

"…Hmphhhh… She has become a citizen of darkness and joined my 'Sacred Kuroneko Knights.' From now on, she is no longer Aragaki Ayase, call her 'Dark Angel.'"

What 'Dark Angel' is that, you M slave!

Kirino listened to Kuroneko's nonsense and turned to me:

"Ayase, care to translate what this idiot is saying to me?"

"There are… many reasons… Winter Comiket… I want to join…"

"Ayase? You want to join Winter Comiket?"

"……"

I nodded.

"Wow — where does that wind come from?" [6]

"— But there is something I need to do before that."

"You mean… about the 'stalker incident' last month?"

Allow me to explain. To focus on studying, onii-san started living alone last month. Then I went to help take care of him every day.

That was when I had the 'stalker incident.'

"…No, it's something more important."

"……"

"I had… a change of heart… I can understand Kirino better now…"

"I want to understand your hobby better — That is what I meant."

'You finally overcame this' — Kuroneko smiled

"…I see. So that's why you want to join Winter Comiket. Why don't you come with us? It's a good chance!"

"Ah!"

"What? Is there something troubling you?"

"No no no… but I wanted to mentally prepare myself."

"?"

Kirino tilted her head. Kuroneko whispered in her ear:

"…I planned to let her cosplay and help us sell our stuff."

"For real! I have to watch! I'll prepare a camera!"

Damn you Kuroneko!!!! You said something unnecessary.

But Kirino was so excited…

"So? Is that what you wanted to talk about?"

"No."

"No, it's not."

Both Kuroneko and I denied it. We took turns and said:

"It's something even more important."

"After the party, I had several discussions with Ayase."

Yes. Talks.

After the test results came out, while Kirino and onee-chan — Manami had 'a talk,' Kuroneko and I also had 'a discussion.'

I also had 'a talk' with Kanako. Kanako also had 'a talk' with Manami. Of course, we all talked about onii-san and Kirino.

"There are many things I want to say… Uhm, I must remind you this is Tamura-senpai's idea."

Hearing that name, Kirino instantly became alert.

"…Did she talk with her usual 'it's all about me' exaggeration?"

"No."

"It's not that."

"…I see. Then tell me."

True, there was something that happened between Kirino and onee-san that we didn't know.

So all we could do was ask Kanako to deliver a message:

"Kirino — do you have 'a talk' with onee-san next month?"

"Yes."

This 'talk' could only happen if 'onii-san gets an A.' But Kirino clearly acted like it would happen.

She must trust onii-san a lot.

…Really… I'm so jealous…

"I heard from Kanako… it seems onee-san said 'I think that Kirino is about to cry,' 'before the graduation, I want to turn them back into a pair of normal siblings.'"

"_____"

Kirino's eyes shot open.

"…Hmph, I see."

She slowly narrowed her eyes. I had never seen that mature expression from her before.

"Kirino… do you have any leads?" asked Kuroneko.

Kirino just smiled:

"It's not like I don't have any… Hm… To put it nicely, she wanted us to make up with each other."

So what about 'Kirino is about to cry'?

'Normal siblings' — what does that mean? I might have a lead myself.

"Thank you for letting me know. But don't worry. I have already hated her for a very long time. No matter what she said, it's not going to change anything. The most important thing in this 'talk' is not Manami or me —"

Kirino stopped.

I understood without saying.

The most important thing in this talk — is onii-chan.

"I have to face myself properly. I don't have much time left though."

Kirino spoke lightly, but her words were full of determination.

She laughed:

"So what? What else did you want to say?"

"…There is one thing."

Kuroneko glanced at me.

……This is a critical moment.

"…Kirino… I — have confessed."

"Ah, really?"

"Yes…"

"Ah — it's good! Because you never talked about it, I thought that you had no interest in boys! Haha ~ I see, Ayase finally has a lover! You must show him to me later!"

Kirino innocently gave me her blessing.

"But… I'm not 100% sure that we will go out…"

"Who? Is there actually a boy in this world that would reject Ayase?"

I was happy because you said that, but I felt a sense of guilt.

"That…"

It's so hard to say —

I looked up.

"That hurts!"

It was Kuroneko's hand. She pinched my thigh in a place where Kirino couldn't see.

(What are you doing!)

I shot her a glare. Kuroneko stared back.

"……"

I understand. You don't have to say anything.

That is my decision, alone.

"What's wrong?" asked Kirino with a confused look.

My next words will hurt her…

"Kirino —"

"I'm going to confess to your brother."

"……Ah."

That was the coldest 'Ah' I had ever heard.

"…I see. Do whatever you want. However…"

Kirino looked away for a second before she looked back at me.

"Ayase… If you have made up with Kuroneko, you must already know why she broke up with Kyousuke."

"…I know. Because Kirino doesn't want onii-san to have a girlfriend, right?"

"Despite that, you are still going to confess?"

"Yes."

I nodded. No matter what Kirino thought, I had made my decision.

"…Also, don't you hate him Ayase? That was why I asked you to take care of him… Did you lie to me?"

"No!"

"_____"

"I didn't lie. I hate him. I've always hated him. I thought so. But… after many talks… after the time he helped us make up… I didn't know how to thank him. He has always helped us; he did everything he could for us…"

"……"

"I don't know when I started to like him. I don't know how to put it into words. That's why —"

"Even if we break up because of this, you will confess?"

"No. It's not like that."

"So why —"

I interrupted her and shouted from the top of my lungs.

"I love Kirino as much as I love onii-san!"

"I will use my own method, which is different from onee-san's, to restore the relationship between Kirino and onii-san! I confessed to onii-san so that he and I could stay together… We could stay together Kirino! Just like I'd stay with you Kirino! I will not give up! Do you have any problem with that!"

That was — the same thing I said to Kirino when we made up.

From her hair style to her work. I have always followed my friend's back.

But Kirino's reaction was outside of my expectations.

"…Just now."

"Yes?"

"…Just now, I said 'do whatever you want'… Can you… please wait until our graduation."

She looked down and said painfully.

"…What will happen after graduation?"

Kuroneko didn't hide her anxiety. Kirino looked at Kuroneko and said:

"I plan to take care of many things before graduation. Even I know that the current situation is not good. So — please wait a few more months."

"It isn't good. What about you?"

Kuroneko coldly asked.

"I will make myself clear too — before you graduate, I will confess to him again."

"—!"

Kirino grit her teeth.

"— Why do you say that!? You, Ayase too…! Even if you confess, it is useless! Because he is a hopeless siscon!"

"I know that much. Both of us will confess exactly because of that —!"

Kuroneko said and nodded.

"Listen to Kuroneko — Kirino, why do you have to lie to yourself? You still continue lying to yourself now. You shouldn't do that. Don't tell me I was wrong."

"We aren't softhearted like Tamura-senpai, 'Just because this is his little sister, I will give her special treatment.'

"Kirino… do you understand what we are trying to say?"

Kirino looked down and didn't say anything.

"……
will say it! Don't joke around with me because you 'think' that I won't say it!"



She exploded.

"Have you said enough —?! I get it already! I'm the cutest little sister in the world, don't look down on me when I'm serious!"

She stood up and faced us:

"Before I graduate, I will do something even more amazing than an eroge could do!"

"Ohh no… We taunted her a little too much."

"…Hm hm hmm… This is the real you… Ahahaha… Just as planned. Belphegor's plan and yours are alike, I don't care — I, Kuroneko will be the winner in the end."

— It is now winter.

Not long before graduation, we declared this to our best friend.

# References


1. ↑ An idiom, meaning that someone will go through anything to keep his/her word.
2. ↑ A character from a Japanese fairy tale.
3. ↑ Volume 1, Chapter 4
4. ↑ Pachinko
5. ↑ Anta in the original text
6. ↑ An idiom, usually used to show that someone is very surprised.

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